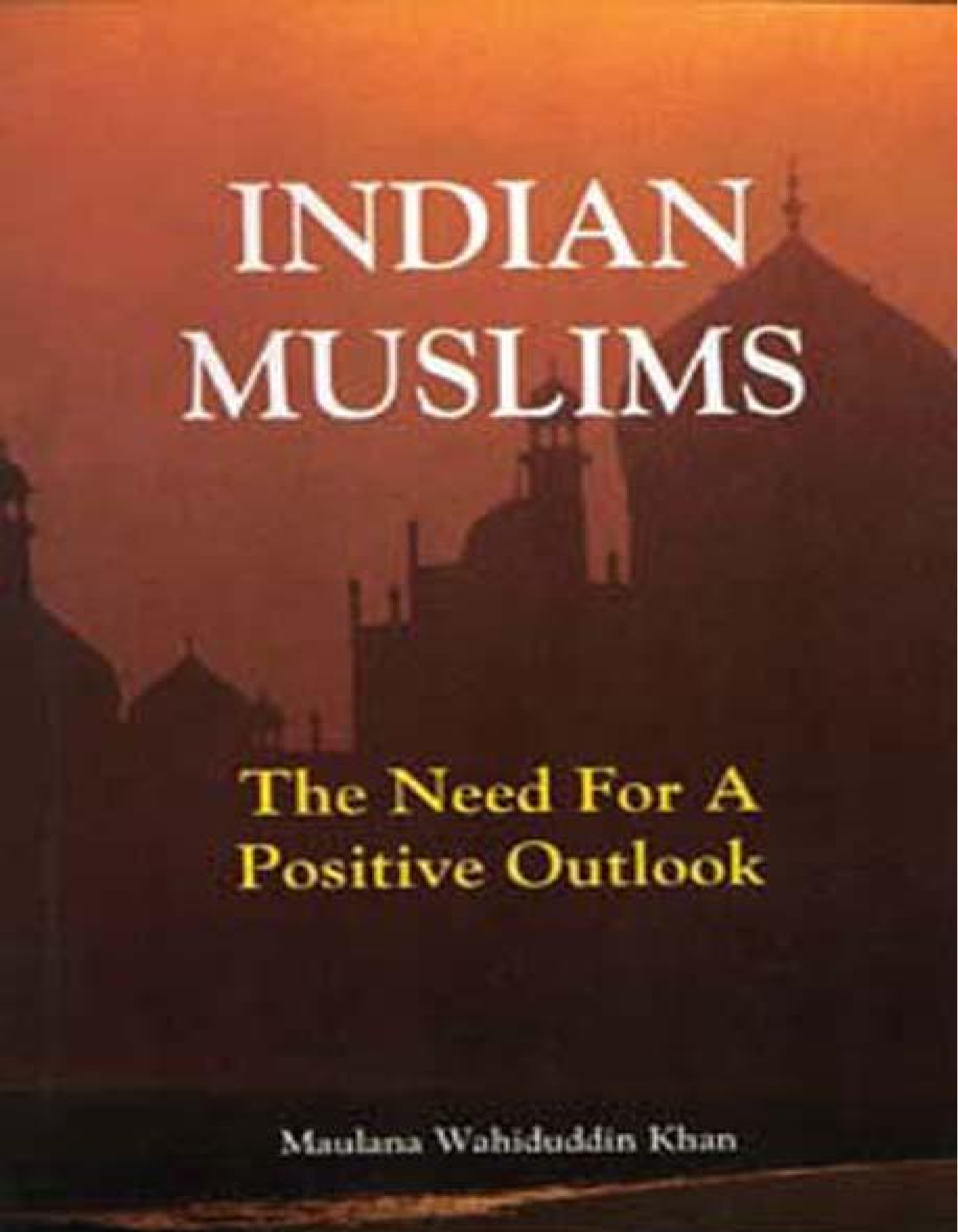


INDIAN
MUSLIMS
The Need For A
Positive Outlook
Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

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PREFACE

When India was set free on August 15, 1947, the whole country was caught in the grip of a severe anti-Muslim wave. The extreme step of assassinating Mahatma Gandhi was meant, inter alia, to leave the Muslims 'defenseless' but, unwittingly, had 'the opposite effect by showing the country how dangerous and undisciplined extreme anti-Moslems could be. (Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi,* pp. 504-505).

The demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya on December 6 is on an exact parallel with Nathu Ram Godsay's murderous attack on the Father of the Nation in that it has elicited the condemnation of extremism, not just by the Muslim fraternity but by serious minded Hindus all over the country.

This more recent anti-Muslim movement was first launched by extremists in 1986, from which point it went on escalating in an atmosphere which became more and more emotionally charged.

Rabble-rousing, which had been the order of the day, reached its climax on December 6, 1992 when

over 100,000 Hindu extremists, spurred on by the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, entered Ayodhya, where they stoned the 465-year-old Babari Masjid, razing it to the ground in a matter of hours.

This is undeniably one of the blackest moments in modern Indian history. A place of worship ought to inspire the greatest respect in society and should be the very last object which anyone would ever think of desecrating. Destroying such a place of worship which is worthy of the utmost reverence is like negating a whole scale of human values.

What happened at Ayodhya ran counter to the judgement of Parliament; it went against the verdict of the Supreme Court and the resolutions of the National Integration Council; it flouted universal opinions and trampled upon the best of Indian traditions. It not only contravened the UN Human Rights Charter but also gave the lie to any would-be conciliatory statements made by certain of the extremist leaders themselves. In short, this action followed no principle, either human or

divine, and enjoyed no support, either national or international. As such, it has been condemned outright by all classes of people.

No right-thinking member of society could do other than brand this incident as the blackest and most deplorable of steps taken by any identifiable group in the country. Its aftermath has been so tragic that ordinary expressions of condemnation will not suffice. But, like other such incidents, this one, too, has its positive aspects. There is still a single ray of light to be seen in all this darkness. And that is that editorials, reports and readers' letters published in the national press testify to the deep sense of shock felt by the majority of Hindus at this dastardly incident. The use of such phrases as 'a dark day,' 'a black day,' 'a day of shame' indicate the degree to which Hindus are in sympathy with Muslims over this issue.

This reaction on the part of Hindus to this recent act of extremism bears out the Qur'anic statement that, 'Verily, with every difficulty there is relief (94:6). That is, in every adverse situation, there is a favorable element which lies hidden. One of the

greater and best-known illustrations of this aphorism is the story the Qur’an tells of Adam’s two sons, Abel and Cain (Habil and Qabil). The conflict between them became so desperate that Cain ultimately decided to kill his younger brother, Abel. Abel once full of life, now lay motionless before him — a lifeless corpse. Now as Cain looked upon the blood-spattered body of this brother whom he had thought of only as a rival, his conscience began to awaken. The humanity of his innermost being began to condemn the crime he had committed. ‘Then he became full of regrets’. (Qur’an, 5:31).

This illustrates an important psychological reality: when revenge crosses all limits, it transforms itself into regret; when anger is given full play, it ultimately turns to acknowledgement; after showing its most cruel face, animality reverts to humanity.

This law of nature, eternal and immutable, serves to maintain the moral equilibrium of social existence. As such, it repeatedly brings misguided individuals back from the brink of rabid extremism to the

calmness and sanity of moderation. In so doing, it brings order out of chaos.

It is this human capacity for regret which guarantees that an extremist movement in any given society will get under way only once, for the moment it perpetrates the unthinkable, it must retreat in anguish from that position; it is that anguish which makes the resurgence of extremism an impossibility. It was in this very way that anti-Muslim fires were doused by Gandhiji's blood. And that is also why neither fascism in Italy, nor Nazism in Germany, could ever reappear after the Second World War.

The physical collapse of the Babari Masjid has become symbolic of the moral collapse of Hindu extremism. God willing, a new consciousness will be awakened in the country in the wake of this callous demolition. Let us hope that at least for the next few generations, there will be no repetition of such an ugly incident.

So far as the Muslims are concerned, their best course would be to close their eyes firmly to the past, and to fix their gaze resolutely upon the

future. They must forever bear in mind that the world has been made by its Creator in such a way that positive possibilities are always in excess of human dilemmas. No instance of oppression, however heinous, has the power to obliterate all conceivable solutions to what are essentially human problems. It should never be felt that every last ray of hope has been extinguished. Muslims must, therefore, seize every possible opportunity for constructiveness and consolidation, and must strive particularly to make progress in the fields of education, commerce and industry.

From the point of view of internal construction, much needs to be done not only for Muslims but by Muslims. They themselves must endeavour to bring about a much-needed religious and moral awakening. In so doing they will give a fresh impetus to their religious and national institutions. But this can happen only if there is unity in their ranks. There are many constructive tasks of this nature which have yet to be performed. But the need of the hour is for Muslims to put the memory of all distasteful

events behind them and to throw themselves wholeheartedly into personal and societal advancement.

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1. THE NEW INDIA

On a two-week stay in England in October 1992, I met many Indians who had left India after independence and settled in London, Birmingham and Manchester. I asked them why they had left India. They replied that their homeland was dear to them, but that they had had to leave it, as there was no good system there, no opportunities for making progress — a point worth thinking about.

All manner of sacrifices were made in order to achieve independence and to improve the system of the country after the removal of colonial rule. Yet, with the dawn of independence, the practical result was quite the reverse. The system of the country actually worsened.

Moti Lal Ghosh, the former editor of the daily *Amrit Bazar Patrika,* died in 1920. In his last days Mahatma Gandhi had met him in a hospital in Calcutta. According to Jawahar Lal Nehru, Moti Lal Ghosh said in this final meeting with Gandhiji that 'I am going to die. But I am happy that I am going to a world where the British Empire did not exist'.

This shows what hopes were associated with independence. Yet all our hopes remained unrealized. Previous generations had held the British responsible for all our problems but, when independence came, it in no way solved our problems; it rather aggravated them.

It is something of a paradox that while our previous generations preferred death to living in India under the British, our present generation prefers to leave India in order to settle in the very homeland of their former ruler. They even take pride in telling others that they and their children are settled in the UK.

Before independence, our leaders held the British collectively responsible for all of India's ailments. But when home rule was established, the country's problems, far from being solved, began to increase.

I should like at this point to narrate a personal experience. Born in 1925, I grew up in a family where active interest was taken in national affairs, and there was much talk of independence. The whole atmosphere outside the house was likewise emotionally charged with the urge to be free. All this led me to believe that slavery was the worst of

conditions and independence the very best. Like many others, I formed an innocent conception of the independence movement as being designed to bring the country straight out of hell and into heaven.

With all those impressions I waited for the day of independence in a state of high expectation. It came finally on August 15, 1947. I was then 22 years of age and living in the UP city of Azamgarh. I still remember going out at night and seeing all the shops and houses illuminated. The new sense of freedom made me feel elated and as I walked along in a state of jubilation, I felt my feet were barely touching the ground. This was a state of happiness I had only so far read about. Now I was having my first real experience of it on August 15, 1947, unfortunately, it was also my last.

When the dawn appeared after the night of August 15, all the lights had gone out, and never again did they shine with the same brilliance. Never again, in our state of freedom, did we experience the same euphoria as we did when we were as yet on the

brink of being independent. We now had our freedom having been realized. The happiness we had expected had somehow failed to materialize.

THE TRUE CAUSE

This tragedy is attributable not so much to the British as to the Indians themselves. There had indeed been a problem between the British and Indians prior to 1947, but the only solution offered was an intensification of the loathing the Indians felt for the British in the hopes that the latter would begin to feel themselves so alienated from the country that they would become unable to rule it.

All possible methods were resorted to surround the British with an inimical atmosphere, and pains were taken to project even their well-intentioned acts in the worst possible light. For instance, before partition, the British had laid a 35,000-mile long railway line which, for the first time, facilitated travel from one end of the country to the other. But even to this a negative aspect was found. These railway lines were portrayed as iron chains forged by the British to keep Indians everywhere fettered in slavery.

It was in this atmosphere of antagonism that the journey towards freedom was made. Those who made the most venomous speeches against the rulers were considered great leaders. Those who launched barbed verbal assaults on them were regarded as mighty heroes. Enmity for the British became synonymous with love for one's country.

The period prior to 1947 was marked by destructiveness; the policy of animosity and opposition proved highly effective. After 1947, there should have ensued a period of constructiveness inspired by love and fellow-feeling. But this was not to be. For reasons of a very convoluted nature, the politics of hatred persisted throughout the dawn of this supposedly new age. The failure to transform them into the politics of love proved the greatest obstacle to the realization of the Indian dream of post-independence days — the dream which had sustained and inspired all Indians in the very darkest of hours.

MINORITY AND MAJORITY

It is a historical fact that, in any given country, the community numerically next in line to the majority

always stands in dread of the larger community's antagonism. While other, smaller minorities remain out of focus, the majority community and the next largest community inevitably become rivals. If, in pre-independence days, the country was faced with the British-Indian problem, the present point at issue is Hindu-Muslim rivalry.

However, the two situations are not entirely identical. While the solution to the British-Indian problem lay in hatred, that of the Hindu-Muslim problem lay in love. Just as the former problem could be resolved only through mutual hatred, the latter could be resolved only through mutual love. At this delicate turn of events, our leaders proved inadequate for the roles they were required to play. That is why even after 1947 the policy of hatred persisted, and the problem went on becoming more and more delicate, and more and more complex.

Japan had a similar problem, and the way the Japanese solved it provides a superb example to other nations. Before the Second World War, the Japanese rose as a nation on the basis of hatred for the Americans, and it was under the influence of

this sentiment that they bombed and destroyed Pearl Harbour, an American Naval base, in December 1941. The ensuing hostilities between the US and Japan ultimately resulted in the total defeat of the latter in 1945.

Now, one probable outcome of this state of affair could have been a persistently hostile stance towards the Americans; But Japanese statesmen held that the time had now come to change their national policy from hatred to love. They made their people understand that if the US had destroyed Hiroshima, so also had the Japanese destroyed Pearl Harbour. The destruction of Hiroshima was a simple act of retaliation. They then advocated coming forward and holding out the hand of friendship to the US, thus heralding a new age of construction in Japan.

They called this turning from hatred to love their 'reverse course.' Those very same nations, which had been considered their enemies before the Second World War, were now accepted as their friends. It is as a result of this change that a new Japan has emerged before the world. The same

Japan which had been vanquished in the Second World War has emerged as the victor in the world of today.

It was just such a 'reverse course' which was required in India after independence. Hatred needed to be converted into love. But our leaders failed to act when the time was ripe. As a result, old hatreds were allowed to go on simmering. The country could never, therefore, be directed towards construction. Freedom for India had spelt nothing but ruin.

What Hindus and Muslims needed to do was abandon their policy of mutual hostility in exactly the same way that Japan had decided to make a friend, rather than an enemy of America. In India, due to the partition movement, Hindus and Muslims had become rivals and antagonists. Now the need of the hour is to foster the idea that they are each other's friends and partner, that they are in fact brothers belonging to the same land.

Before 1947, certain unwise Muslim leaders had wrongly advocated the idea that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations. This theory,

responsible for their isolations had nothing, however, to do with either reason or Islam, because a nation is established on the basis of land, not religion. Without doubt Hindus and Muslims have separate religions, but both are one nation because both live in the same country. That is why all the Prophets have addressed their non-Muslim countrymen as 'O my people.' But in the post-independence years this concept has not been effectively presented before the people.

So far as I can gather from my study of this matter, both the Hindus and Muslims are equally responsible for the problem facing the country today. Neither group has fulfilled its responsibility to the new India. It is the intellectuals in a community who lead the people. But in free India the intellectuals of both the communities have failed in this respect.

From amongst the Hindus, pseudo-intellectuals have arisen, who advocate the concept of the 'first defeat and second defeat.' They say that Hindus wanted a united India and that it was the Muslims who demanded partition. On this issue the Hindus

had to concede to them. This was their 'first defeat.' Now, the Hindus, being in a majority and in a dominant position, will under no circumstances admit to a 'second defeat.'

This point has been made so forcefully that the minds of Hindus, consciously or unconsciously, have been dominated by it. That is why, wherever any controversy arises between Hindus and Muslims, the former makes an issue of it as if it were a question of a 'second defeat.' For instance, if a Hindu procession passes through a Muslim locality and the residents ask the participants to change their route, the latter will never accede to this request, because for them this would constitute a 'second defeat.' As a result of this psychology, Hindu energies are largely directed towards negative pursuits, and not towards the positive construction of the country. In a bid to save themselves from a 'second defeat' they are moving head-on towards total defeat.

Maulana Hifzur Rahman (1901-1962), a leader of Jamiat 'Ulama-e-Hind once said that he would consider India a secular country only when it

became possible for a Muslim to slap a Hindu in the street without it triggering a communal riot in the city. It is undeniable that every time such a riot takes place, it is caused by some relatively trifling matter, and mostly the conflict starts between just two individuals. As such it should be resolved at that level. But whenever any such incident takes place, it immediately becomes a prestige issue between the two communities, ultimately assuming the proportions of bloody communal riots. This is entirely the result of the above mentioned psychology.

Had Hindus taken partition not as a 'first defeat' but just as an incident in past history, India could have been launched on a completely new and positive course, just as happened in Japan in 1947 after the Second World War. But, thanks to the first defeat psychology, India's full potential is yet to be realized.

The strategy worked out to solve the minorities problem was, although differently worded, that of Hindutva or Indianisation. This strategy, briefly stated, aims at developing a uniform culture by

obliterating the differences between all of the cultures co-existing in the country. This was felt to be the way to communal harmony and national unity. It was thought that this would put an end once and for all to the minorities problem.

However beautiful this suggestion may appear to be, it is certainly impracticable. In the first instance, it was the Emperor Akbar who had wanted to have this uniform culture prevail all over the country. Yet, with all his great political strength, he failed. After independence, Dr. Bhagwan Das spent thirty years in the preparation of his book *The Essential Unity of All Religions,* but it was all to no avail. Mahatma Gandhi also espoused the same cause saying, *Ram Rahim ek hai,* (Ram and Rahim are one and the same) but he had no real success with this policy.

After the Second World War, with people of so many diverse cultures inhabiting the US, a movement was launched there, generally known as Americanisation, which was aimed at fostering a single culture throughout the country. It is significant for us at this juncture that this movement was a total failure, and that the principle of

multiculturalism has now been adopted there.

In terms of consequences, the choice for us in this matter is not between uniculture and multiculture, but between multiculture and destruction. If we insist on uniculture, the results will be disastrous. Wisdom lies in adopting the ways of tolerance and in being content with religious pluralism.

Let us consider the Muslim viewpoint shortly before 1947 when the movement for the partition of the country was being launched. The Hindus opposed this move, thus giving rise to such serious misgivings in Muslim circles as could not be eradicated even after partition had taken place. Moreover, after partition, the many pseudo-intellectuals who arose, no less amongst Muslims than amongst Hindus, managed to spread the idea among Muslims that Hindus wanted to make a 'second Spain' of the divided India. This thinking became so common among Muslims as to form a part of Muslim psychology.

The position is now that wherever any unpleasant incident takes place on the part of the Hindus, e.g. when they lead a procession through a Muslim

locality, or some misguided Hindus raise anti-Muslim slogans, the Muslims immediately feel that the Hindus 'want to make a second Spain.' As a result of this defensive mentality, they at once rise to challenge the Hindus. Now with this reaction and inevitable counter-reaction, the atmosphere becomes so vitiated that the ultimate result is rioting.

Both Hindus and Muslims have fallen into negative thinking because of one fear or another. If there is a Hindu-Muslim problem in the country, it is because neither community has been able to play a truly constructive role in the shaping of the nation's destiny.

It is too much to hope that the solution to such complex problems could ever be sought on a joint basis. Recognition of this state of impasse is of particular relevance in the present instance. If ever a solution is to be found, it shall have to come from one or the other of the communities in question. Everything will depend on one community, of its own volition, taking the initiative in the vaster interests of the country as a whole. If we keep waiting for both communities to bear equal shares

in the responsibility we shall have to wait forever. Historical events and human psychology both tilt the scales heavily against any such possibility.

This being the situation, I would advise Muslims to take the initiative in putting an end — on a unilateral basis — to all mutual discord. In the process they should neither ask Hindus to change their course of action, nor should they allow themselves to be provoked by anti-Muslim slogans. They should neither complain about their comparatively minimal admissions to government services, nor should they launch protest movements on issues such as Urdu, Personal Law and Muslim universities. In short, on all Muslim questions, they should abandon the methods of protest, complaint and reaction and should launch their movements not on the basis of externally targeted protestations, but on that of sound internal construction.

If Muslims follow the principle of unilateralism, they will not only be travelling on the 'reverse course', but will also be taking major *steps* towards earning divine rewards, for unilateral patience is the greatest of the Prophet's Sunnah.

The emigration to Mecca was an act of unilateral patience. So also was the return from Hudaybiyyah without performing Umrah (minor pilgrimage). Indeed, all controversial matters were similarly resolved on a unilateral basis by the Prophet Muhammad. If Muslims were to follow this principle, they would be following a Sunnah of the Prophet — a means of earning great rewards.

This is far from being a single matter, but one rather of great significance. There is no denying that after independence Muslims were in a position to play a great creative role in the country, circumstances being greatly in their favour. But they failed to give proof of the necessary forbearance and in so doing, they failed to play this creative role. They should have remembered the words of the Qur'an: 'We made them leaders and they guided people to the truth. This happened when they remained patient.' Leadership does demand this very high price: patience. Muslims, failing to pay this price, have become neither leaders nor guides in the new India.

INDIA AND MUSLIMS

Centuries ago, the Muslims — Arabs — who came to India, were welcomed because of their superior qualities. In his *Discovery of India* Jawahar Lal Nehru writes of the Arabs coming to India with their 'brilliant culture' (p.227).

In later periods, when Muslim rule was established in India, the rulers, although not blessed with the same superior attributes, nevertheless brought to India the gifts of peace and justice. This Islamic revolutionary wave was so powerful that it influenced the minds of Muslim generations for several centuries.

For instance, during the rule of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, his queen, Nur Jahan, unwittingly shot dead a passerby. The case was brought before the court of Jahangir. The Qazi fearlessly gave the verdict that Nur Jahan should be put to death according to the Shari'ah. Jahangir and his queen did not dare flout *the fatwa* (verdict). Compare this with the conduct of James I of England, a contemporary of Jahangir. During the reign of King James, a certain Justice Coke gave his

verdict in a fiscal case in favour of a merchant and against the King. The King was so enraged at this verdict that he removed Justice Coke from office.

The Mughal period was followed by British rule in India. When the independence movement was launched, the Muslims played an important role in it at great sacrifice to themselves. The Hindus had no such concept of *jihad* as the Muslims had, so that it was only when the Muslims, inspired by the concept of *jihad,* took an active part in it, that the movement really gained momentum. It was the Muslims who gave to the freedom movement such potent phrases as *Jihad-e-Azadi, Mujahid-e-Azadi, Shahid-e-Azadi,* etc.

THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Then India gained its independence in 1947. But at this point Muslims, lacking an effective leadership, became the victims of circumstance. Prior to 1947 they had enjoyed the status of a giver group. But after 1947 they were reduced to being a mere taker group. And this is the greatest tragedy for Muslims in modern India.

1. The New India

Before 1947, Muslims were honoured and respected. But subsequently they failed to gain the same status. The cause was not traceable to enemy plots and prejudice, but lay rather in the internal weakness which had led them to divest themselves of their creativity in this modern age. They paid no heed to God's admonition that only those would find permanence, stability and firmness in this world who proved themselves useful to others. (Qur'an 13:17)

In the new India, there are more opportunities now than ever before for Muslims to play a creative role. They are required only to identify these opportunities and avail of them. Here are two examples to illustrate this point. The first is given by Swami Vivekananda, who rises head and shoulder above other Indian thinkers on the subject of India's post-independence reconstruction. Replying to a letter in 1898, he writes, 'For our own motherland a junction of two great systems, Hinduism and Islam, is the only hope. I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body' (p. 380).

The second example is given by Mahatma Gandhi. For the first time in 1936, Congress formed its government in various states. It was at that juncture that Mahatma Gandhi, through the pages of his journal *Harijan* (July 27, 1937) advised the Congress ministers to lead simple lives. He wanted to hold up to them shining examples of this way of life, but did not choose to refer to Ram or Krishan as they were not historical personalities. So he took as his models the lives of the Caliphs of Islam of its first phase, Abu Bakr and 'Umar. The rulers of vast empires, they lived nevertheless like paupers.

This appreciation of the Islamic character shown by Swami Vivekanand and Mahatma Gandhi testifies to the ability of the Muslims to play a great part in the construction of India. In fact, the country was waiting for the Muslims to grasp the opportunity to play a decisive role and win an honourable position for themselves in the re-structuring of the nation. But the Muslims did not fulfill these hopes. As a result, the country as a whole has suffered.

For the post-independence reconstruction of the country, there were two prerequisites — a proper

scale of values and practical examples to support them. For instance, great value should be set upon rulers leading their lives like the common people so that they are always reminded of the common man's needs. By the same token, VIPs should be subordinate to the law of the land, just as any ordinary person is. Similar importance is equality of status in society, regardless of colour, caste or creed. Posts and honours, too, should be awarded solely on the basis of merit, and not on the strength of one's family, or position, etc.

Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi and many other Indian thinkers were of the view that although the concept of such a scale of values existed in Hindu traditions, there were no historical examples to illustrate them in practice. Such examples were to be found only in Islam, out of all the religions. These great thinkers believed, therefore, that for the thorough reconstruction of the country, the Islamic contribution was vital.

This was very true and positive thinking. But to make it a reality, the Muslims, too, had to play their part. Alas, the Muslims failed to grasp this

opportunity, so that after independence our country went seriously off course.

The self-styled intellectuals would say that in this the Muslims were not to blame. That the real culprits were the Hindus. They would put forward the argument that after partition the Muslims had been continually thwarted by prejudice and injustice on the part of the majority and had, as a result, fallen a prey to feelings of insecurity. As such, their psychology had become defensive. No one who developed such a psychology could be capable of playing a creative role.

But there is only a very slight element of truth in this. Whatever the Muslims complained of was, in actual fact, the price they had to pay for living in this country. Their complaints might indeed have been fewer if they had remembered the Qur'anic adage, that God grants leadership to those who prove to be patient.

Patience, after all, is necessarily the price of leadership. An inevitable pre-condition of assuming the role of leadership in any country or community is to bear up resolutely under the injustice meted

out by others. Without this patience and forbearance, no one can with distinction wear the mantle of leadership of the world. This is an immutable law of God, and to it there can be no exceptions.

What Muslims needed to do in post-1947 India was adopt a policy of avoidance when faced with any provocation from their countrymen. They should also have borne with any discrimination they were subjected to. In short, they ought to have remained patient, whatever their grievances, real or imaginary. The unilateral adoption of a policy of non-confrontation on all occasions ought to have been a prime imperative.

By refusing to develop a negative mentality, they would have found the time and the means to present to the people not only the teachings of Islam, but also such practical examples from Islamic history as would have steered the nation on the right course. For a whole century now the country has been waiting for just such guidance. But since the Muslims lacked patience, they failed to play this leading role.

THE TASK AHEAD OF US

Islam is a religion in harmony with human nature. This means that it does not require a propagator to spread its message among the various peoples. It spreads on its own strength, flowing onwards like a mighty river to quench the world's thirst for truth. By virtue of its own merits, it finds its way into people's very hearts.

Islam, moreover, is not a new religion. Its long history has assured its status of established truth, and there is no residual element of controversy which could prejudice its general acceptance. These very virtues of being well-known and historically authenticated have invested Islam with the power to spread, even when there is no one to expedite the process. Even without a herald, it rings in people's ears.

This feature of Islam should have caused it to enter the hearts and minds of the people of this country. In effect, this had begun to happen quite gradually, but two factors in India's present history have had a slowing effect on this natural process. One is the 'two nation theory' and the other is the Muslims' policy of protestation.

The two-nation theory was invented by certain Muslim leaders before independence. The fact that it was never endorsed by the *'ulama* is an indication of its patent untenability. However, for a variety of reasons, it spread among the public to the extent of giving rise to a turbulent movement. As such it proved a major obstacle to a proper understanding of Islam. It stands to reason that when an atmosphere is created in which people think of Muslims and non-Muslims as belonging to two separate and distinct nations, the non-Muslims are bound to feel disinclined towards Muslims.

This two-nation policy should have disappeared after 1947, but thanks to the superficial policies of certain ill-advised Muslim leaders, it continued to hold sway. Moreover, the circumstances after 1947 caused an intensification of this negative mentality. Bearing aloft the banners of protest, Muslims stood out as a challenge to their countrymen. The atmosphere was naturally vitiated by the resulting bitterness between the two communities. Islam was then never given the chance to become a subject of serious discussion.

It has now become vital for Muslims to free their minds from the two-nation theory and to refrain absolutely from all such activities as could be responsible for creating tension between Hindus and Muslims. They should take it upon themselves, unilaterally, to ensure that a favourable atmosphere is created between the two communities.

In the light of this analysis, the first and most urgent task for Muslims is to promote all forms of Hindu-Muslim amity. They should refrain entirely from engaging in any activity which could mar Hindu-Muslim relationships and should simply bear with any injustice meted out to them by the other party.

This is necessary if a propitious atmosphere is to be created between the two communities. Only then will there be any chance of Islam being taken up as a matter of serious study by open-minded people.

If, in all matters of communal differences, Muslims could unilaterally adopt the policy of avoidance, and eschew all words and deeds which could produce communal hatred, then Islam could on its own become the subject of a serious study aimed at finding guidelines for social reconstruction, in the

same way that western science, when seriously taken up, became the cornerstone of the nation's industrial expansion. Then the time would come when, with Islamic guidance, the country's history would begin to take on a new shape.

The self-development of Muslims is a primary condition for the propagation of Islamic teachings in this country. As part of this process, Muslims should, for instance, learn the languages of the country. For forty years Muslims have been agitating for the safeguarding of Urdu, but instead of concentrating on Urdu, they should have been campaigning for Muslims to gain a mastery of all regional languages. The movement to safeguard Urdu is a sign of the desire to remain static, whereas any step taken towards learning others' languages is a sure sign of progress.

Another very important task is to make translations of the Qur'an and Hadith available in all languages at nominal prices. This should be undertaken on such a large scale that everyone may have easy access to Islamic teachings and history in his own mother tongue.

Books should be prepared on these aspects of Islam which are of special relevance to contemporary issues, simplicity, modesty, trustworthiness, etc., values without which no social order can be properly established. The general public should be made acquainted with the lustre of these virtues as they shine through the events of Islamic history. Below are a few examples from the first phases of the Islamic era.

A truly notable example of simplicity of lifestyle is that of the first Caliph, Abu Bakr Siddiq, who led a life in no way different from that of the ordinary people of Medina. Another example is that of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz. The borders of his empire stretched from Sind to Spain, yet he had no special arrangements made for his own personal security. In the spheres of justice and equality, there is the story of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph, who summoned the son of 'Amr ibn al-'Aas, the Governor of Egypt, to confront him with a young Egyptian commoner whom he had unjustly whipped. Giving his verdict in this case, he ordered the young Egyptian to return the whipping in full measure. The fourth Caliph, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, was

himself summoned to appear in court like an ordinary citizen when a Jewish merchant began litigation against him. But perhaps the most significant instance of the recognition of human equality occurred when, after the conquest of Mecca, the Prophet entrusted the duty of calling *azan* on the Ka'bah to Bilal, a negro slave.

Islamic history abounds in instances of such exemplary conduct that the general public could have benefited greatly from having them presented in their correct historical context and in a purely realistic style. But this has seldom been attempted. It is true that books on these subjects have appeared from time to time, but they have invariably been written in a style which exudes national pride.

The actual problem of present day Muslims is the negative mentality with which they have entered upon this new age. From beginning to end, this is what has caused their modern history to go awry; and if their future is to take a more promising shape, it is imperative that they re-model their thinking along more positive lines.

Prior to 1947, Indian Muslim leaders had a 14-point list of demands. After 1947, it became a 20-point list. All along, before and after partition, the Muslims have been a demanding group, and history has shown, time and time again, that no individual or nation can be both giver and taker at one and the same time. It is because Muslims have become a taker and not a giver group that they have failed to figure prominently in the task of national reconstruction.

* * *

1993 has been a year of meetings for me. During this period I have travelled extensively throughout the country and met people from a broad cross-section of society. Most of the people I met seemed to have lost their optimism about the way this country is going to develop. But I differ from them. I am still full of hope for India's future.

It is my firm belief that despair runs counter to nature's overall system and that like any other kind of negativism it is unworthy of serious consideration. Have we forgotten, perhaps, that even the blackest of nights is followed by the

sunrise? This sequence of events is so totally and perfectly predictable that astronomers can tell with confidence the exact moment the sun will rise one thousand years from today. In a world, therefore, in which day will quite unfailingly follow night every twenty four hours ad infinitum, how is it possible that the darkness of despair will not be dispelled by the light of hope?

Here is an illustration of this point. On December 6, 1992, when the Babari Mosque was demolished, many newspapers made the assertion that this would turn out to be only the first of a long series of such incidents, anything from 300 to 3,000 mosques having been targetted by extremists for demolition. But my interpretation of the situation was quite the reverse. I said that no other mosque was going to be demolished, for what had been witnessed was not the beginning of anti-masjid politics but the end.

This may appear strange today, but both communities very soon gave their tacit approval to the idea that Muslims should forget about their one mosque and Hindus should forget about the many mosques that, in the heat of the moment, they felt

should be demolished. Though there is still some talk, on both sides, in the former antagonistic vein, passions are definitely cooling over what is, after all an anachronism which cannot continue indefinitely.

What underlay my own personal conviction about how this situation would develop was substantial historical evidence that destruction having run its course, must ultimately abate and come to an end. The entire history of mankind abounds in such instances.

However, a welcome panacea to cut short present ills would be the general acceptance of pluralism. But upholders of this principle have first to contend with the problem — nay, threat — of 'cultural nationalism.' The proponents of this latter movement insist that India's composite culture must be moulded into a uni-Indian culture, being of the view that it is only through such endeavour that social harmony can be produced.

Serious-minded people regard this movement as a genuine threat to the integrity of the country. This is because any attempt to replace the existing cultural set-up with an artificially formulated 'culture'

would bring in its wake a fresh spate of strife and dissension. Such steps, disruptive as they are of the status quo, can never produce social harmony.

I do not, however, see any real danger in such a movement, for the simple reason that those who set themselves up against nature are bound to fall far short of their objectives. Their goals, could they but grasp this fact, are unrealizable.

Those who advocate changing the 'composite' culture of the country show their ignorance of the fact that culture is almost always of an inherently composite nature. Culture is not something which can be formulated in some office, or in some meeting or conference: it is invariably the result of a long and natural process of social action, reaction and interaction. Far from being the instant fallout of some political resolution, it is the culmination of a time-honoured, historical accretion. This being so, I regard cultural nationalism, or uni-culturalism as being against the laws of nature. Not even a super power can fly in the face of nature.

Besides, where uni-culture smacks of narrow-mindedness, multiculture stands for

broadmindedness. I cannot believe that my countrymen would be so foolish as to prefer to be narrow-minded. In July, 1993, a meeting was held in New Delhi in memory of Girilal Jain, the former editor of the *Times of India*. Speaking on this occasion, the present editor, Dilip Padgaonkar, made the point that because the human identity is composed of so many elements, it can never be thought of as being limited in form. According to influences which had shaped his own life, he mentioned being born into a particular family and growing up with a particular mother tongue and having the religion of his social background. When he went abroad to different countries, there were other influences which went into the shaping of his identity. Many of these elements became inseparable parts of his psyche. Describing the vastness of the human personality, he said, 'I am large enough to contain all these contradictions.'

I think these words convey the spirit not only of India but also of humanity in its broadest sense. In terms of the sense of identity which a language confers, there are still complaints about the non-fulfillment of promises made by Indian leaders

prior to 1947, that 'Hindustani' written in both Persian and Devnagri scripts would be the national language of liberated India. The later decision to make Hindi the official language of post-independence India is still regarded as an affront and a deliberately limiting factor. But, in the context of the present day, I regard all this lamentation over Hindi's predominance as having little or no relevance.

Language may be an important part of a composite culture, but it is not minted by a handful of people. It comes into being after centuries of development. When Muslims came to India, they brought with them Arabic and Persian. At that time many languages were spoken in Delhi and the surrounding areas, such as Haryanvi, Punjabi, Khadi Boli, Brijbhasha, Rajasthani, etc. With the interaction of Muslims and the local people, a new language began to develop. This language came to be known as Hindustani. It was a common language formed by deriving words from both foreign and local languages. Even today, it is the language of many people in India, although Muslims remain more Urdu-oriented, while

Hindus, generally speaking, are more Hindi-oriented. It is significant that all the major Hindi dailies use Hindustani written in Devnagri script, that being the only really understandable language for the majority of the Indian people.

Muslims, however, still make a grievance of this use of Devnagri script. But they are wrong to do so. If they were simply to apply themselves to learning this script along with Urdu script they would find that they could have easy access not only to news and journalistic commentary but to a much wider field of literature and general information that is available to them at present. Devnagri script, being phonetic, is easy to learn, and its acquisition would bring it home to Muslims, once they began to make use of it, that the prevalent national language in actuality is Hindustani rather than Hindi, a language with which they have been familiar all their lives. They should learn a lesson from the many Hindu Punjabi officials who were schooled in Persian and Urdu, but who, after independence had suddenly to make the transition from Urdu to Hindi in their official work, without their ever having had any previous knowledge of Devnagri script. No one

says that this changeover was easy, but the fact remains that it was successfully accomplished by dint of personal endeavour. Muslims must begin to see linguistic change as the need of the hour.

Whatever the concomitant pressures on the national identity, it should be borne in mind that the future of a nation, inevitably shaped as it is by historical forces, is never carved out by just a single individual, or a single group. And India is no exception to this rule.

2. INDIAN MUSLIMS' PRIORITIES

Over the last forty years, in the context of a predominantly Hindu sub-continent, the Indian Muslims, second in number only to Indonesian Muslims (over 125 million), have nevertheless failed to benefit from their being the largest minority group. Although, at the time of partition, they failed to make necessary mental adjustments to the new Indian situation. They should have tried to gain a position for themselves in the country by becoming a creative minority, but, sad to say, they failed to prove their worth. They may be the largest minority community, but they have become the most deprived of all groups in the country.

In view of their creed, tradition, history and numbers, the Muslims were certainly in a position to make a major contribution to the life of new India; the saying 'in giving we receive' could well have come true for them. But, in order to do so, they needed a period of tranquillity; and this could have been possible only if they had unilaterally withdrawn all their grudges and complaints against the majority and risen above the reactionary

psychology of the times. But, unfortunately, the Muslim leadership failed to give the necessary guidance. As a result, the Muslims were reduced to being group 'with demands;' as such they could not become a giver group.

MORAL STATURE

The religion of the Muslims gives them enough moral stature to play a real and effective part in tackling the grave problems that India is facing these days. But, to be able to play this role, a 'superior solution' (a phrase of Toynbee's) was required. It is thanks to intellectual bankruptcy on the part of the Muslim leadership that no such solution has been found.

A thorough and pertinent analysis of the problem of the Indian Muslims has been made by an American Orientalist, Dr. Theodore Paul Wright, Jr., who has been writing exhaustively on the subject for the last 25 years in the most prestigious journals of the world. Dr Wright's advice to the Indian Muslims is 'to be as inconspicuous as possible so as not to draw Hindu backlash.' He concedes, though, that 'this is a very hard advice to follow for a proud people

living in the midst of their monuments of glory.'

He divides the Indian Muslims into two broad categories — the 'coastal' Muslims and the 'inland' Muslims. The latter he calls 'monument-conscious, living in the midst of their Taj Mahals and Red Fort and Char Minars' — those who have not forgotten that they once constituted the ruling elite minority. It is significant, he feels, that the 'Hindus pay little or no attention to coastal Muslim trading communities,' whereas 'the price they (the inland Muslims) pay is very heavy in terms of the riots that occur.'

If the Muslims fail to relate to their present situation, it is in large measure due to their emotional development having atrophied in memories of their glorious past: they had, after all, been rulers of South Asia for almost a millennium. This, indeed, is the principal underlying factor in the lack of realism which marks a great deal of their own planning for the future. Adverse circumstances having led them to the point where the only feasible course is to take 'a back seat,' they are still unwilling to face up to the reality of the situation.

Worse, they are misled by their leaders, who keep harking back to the heyday of the Mughal reign and who insist on dwelling upon slights (imagined or otherwise) to the Islamic psyche. In the present context, the paths along which the Muslims are directed by popular leaders can only lead to destruction.

The realisation has not yet come to them that from the position of the 'back seat' they are free to devote their time and energy to exploiting their own considerable potential. By putting aside notions of privilege and precedence, they can better educate and develop themselves in consonance with the modern and fast changing setting in which they now find themselves. It is simply a question of their getting their priorities straight.

A prominent businessman, when asked about his secret of success, said 'starve the problems, feed the opportunities.' And my advice to the Muslims would be the same. History, after all, abounds in examples of peoples who have successfully risen from the ashes of their dead selves. A case in point is modern Japan. Its denizens, by their own account

‘children of the sun,’ genuinely believed themselves superior to all other races, and, as such, within their rights in attempting to dominate other nations. Their slogan was: ‘East Asia for Japan.’ This way of thinking on the part of the Japanese was responsible for their being belligerent and aggressive as a nation from 1937 to 1945, during which period they captured Manila, Singapore and Rangoon. But they finally met with the most crushing defeat when their rival, America, dropped two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thus militarily crippling Japan.

They then had no alternative but to accept a ‘humiliating surrender.’ They now had to come to terms with a reality which was given expression to in a message broadcast by Emperor Hirohito on August 14, 1945: ‘We have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable.’ On September 2, Japan signed a document which ratified the supremacy of America over Japan.

REVERSE COURSE

Of course, there had been attempts by military extremists to prevent the emperor from making this broadcast. When these failed, 'there were a number of suicides among the military officers and nationalists who felt themselves dishonoured,' *(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 10/86)*. But, by and large, the people accepted the position — the Japanese called it the 'reverse course' — of a vanquished nation. They took the view rather that they now had an opportunity to enter upon a period of national reconstruction.

By temporarily accepting the political and economic superiority of America, Japan was able to give its undivided attention to the fields of science and technology, thereby effecting its own national rehabilitation. In a matter of 30 years, Japan was able to raise itself from a position of economic inferiority to one of acknowledged superiority throughout the world. Their success in the field of electronics alone has been phenomenal. Even the Americans have started showing a marked preference for Japanese goods because of their

superior quality and competitive prices. Inevitably, this state of affairs has proved extremely disquieting for American economic analysts. Pete Wilson, an expert on American affairs, comments: 'The Japanese semiconductor Godzilla is now destroying everything but Tokyo.'

After the Second World War, Japan had been very much in debt to America. But it was not long before the situation was entirely reversed. In 1986, $26 billion worth of American goods were exported to Japan, as opposed to Japan's exports to America, which exceeded $85 billion. Today, America has, in effect, become the word's biggest creditor. A whole spate of books have come out on this issue, one of the most interesting, *Japan Number One,* having become a best-seller in America.

STRATEGIC RETREAT

In this world, it is only those who stop railing against defeat and accept it with a view to doing something positive about the situation who can ultimately succeed. We should never lose sight of the fact that a strategic retreat makes it possible to return to the fray. Such tactics were very well

understood by the Muslims 1,400 years ago when they drew up the peace treaty of Hudaybiyyah which, although apparently over-conciliatory towards the opponent, ultimately permitted the Islamic mission to go forward unhindered.

We must concede that ours is a highly competitive world, one in which success, and sometimes our very survival, is a question of outdistancing others. But, looked at positively, this spirit of competition is the ladder to human progress: few advances have been made in history without this spirit having been predominant. The atomic age would have been ushered in much later had it not been for America's urge to attain world leadership. The electronic age might not have seen such exponential development without the Japanese urge to climb to the top rung of the economic ladder. Conversely, if those who had been left behind had resorted only to complaints and protests, instead of taking constructive action, they would just have been frittering away valuable time and energy, and would ultimately have come face to face with annihilation.

The first step towards taking positive action is to admit defeat and face the realities of the situation. Once that psychological hurdle has been cleared, there is nothing to stop an individual, community or nation from working towards regaining, or even bettering, its lost position. What must be avoided at all costs is sinking irrevocably into a morass of paranoid stagnation. While there is nothing to be gained from pessimism, there is everything to be gained from a positive approach.

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In the second instatement of his article, ‘Muslims After Partition,’ (*The Times of India,* January 7, 1988), Girilal Jain wrote: ‘The Indian Muslim perception of having ruled over India for a thousand years played a major role in the rise of Muslim ‘nationalism in the sub-continent.’ He makes the point that this Muslim self-definition in terms of a glorious past is not entirely tenable, considering that the ‘glory’ of the past had been based on an only partially consolidated severignty, and his verdict is that ‘the gap between self definition and reality has dogged the Indian Muslims and through them the rest of us

since at least the middle of the nineteenth century.' While I would agree that a change of outlook on the part of Indian Muslims would solve many of the problems, I feel that the 'glory' of the Muslims' past having been shown in a controversial light, tends to obscure the real issue, which is that no community which is content to bask in the glories of the past (whether real or imaginary) can ever be a success in the world of today.

LARGER HISTORY

To put this issue into its proper perspective, however, we must not overlook the fact that this 'one thousand-year-rule' mentality of Indian Muslims is not a purely local phenomenon, but is a part of the larger history of Islam. The extraordinary conquests of Muslims in the past, which brought about the spread of Islam, are incontrovertible facts of history. Michael H. Hart, in his book, *The Hundred: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*, (New York, 1978) places the Prophet of Muhammad at the 'top of the hundred best.' 'He was the only man in history,' he writes, 'who was supremely successful on both the

religious and secular levels.' Professor Wilfrid Blunt writes, 'There is, perhaps, nothing more amazing in the whole long history of mankind than the extent and the rapidity of the dissemination of Islam.'

Let us not deny, then, that Islam did have a glorious past. But the more glorious the past, the more wrongheaded it is for present-day Indian Muslims to live in that past. The mistake they make is not so much to exaggerate the glitter of a bygone era, as to believe implicitly that that era extends right up to the present. That is the belief which continually adds fuel to the fire of their paranoia.

While Jain has laid stress on the Muslim predicament having arisen from the 'gap between self-definition and reality,' I would put it more plainly, and say that it is overweening pride which renders them incapable of adapting to present-day conditions. They think of themselves, quite simply, as a superior group. But the truth is, that in comparison to all other nations, there is no sphere in which they have not actually regressed. It is little wonder that the external world does not accord them the same lofty position as they do themselves.

World journalism, which is almost wholly in the hands of non-Muslims, paints a sad picture of their inferiority. Their sense of superiority, of course, rejects this outright; but their only other responses are mental agitation, neurosis and a great deal of unnecessary skirmishing with imagined foes. Where Girilal Jain has based his analysis on Muslims’ self-definition vis-à-vis the past, I would say that the root of the Muslim problem lies in their erroneous self-definition vis-à-vis the present.

A popular misconception which has arisen in latter years is that the Muslim problem is the product of Islam itself. There is consequently the widely held view that if the Muslim problem has to be solved, the Muslim religion is in need of reconsideration, if not actually of overhaul. But this theory has no argument to support it. The truth is that whatever malaise afflicts the Muslims, it is entirely the creation of their own leaders. In modern times, when Muslim domination came to an end, Muslim leaders began to project this new situation as the result of oppression, whereas it was simply a question of the changes which came with the passage of time. The problem ought to have been

solved by a better adaptation to changed sets of circumstances, but the only course which these leaders saw fit to take was that of protest. Such efforts were doomed to end in failure. And we see evidence of that failure on all sides.

The modern, dominant nations were, in fact, representatives of a new era. Theirs was a new age which brought a great revolution in human thought. Traditional knowledge yielded pride of place to scientific disciplines, and the rise of technology caused profound changes in every sphere of life: industrial produce replaced handicrafts, the steamship replaced the sail boat, long-range automatic weapons replaced the musket, and so on. It was the slowness of Muslims to bring themselves abreast of these developments which left them far behind others in the race of life and not, as is generally supposed, the plotting, conspiracies and oppression of other nations.

When it became clear that there was a challenge to Muslim superiority, and it was known exactly what the nature of that challenge was, Muslim leaders should immediately have set about taking concrete

steps to end the disparities between Muslim nations and the more technologically advanced nations of the world. What they did, on the contrary, was to open a wholly useless front to oppose and protest against these dominant powers; how regrettable that they should have remained blind to the futility of such combativeness right up to the present day.

Had they made a timely assessment of what created the hiatus between Muslims and other nations, they would have set the feet of Muslims on the path of education, and would, in the process, have enabled them to acquire the strengths of the modern world. Their energies would then have contributed to a positive struggle, instead of being frittered away in negative reaction.

Up till now Muslims have tended to attribute their problems to prejudice and discrimination and to waste the better part of their time and energy in railing against offenders who often exist only in their own imaginations. What I have to say is simply that it is high time they changed their way of thinking and devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the processes of self-reconstruction.

Our world — let us face it — is one of stiff competition and the race of life between individuals and communities is unending. The real problem of Muslims is that, at this point in their history, they have been left behind by other communities, particularly in the fields of education and economic development. The major part of the 'discrimination and atrocities' that Muslims are facing in this country are, in actual fact, the consequences of their own backwardness, which they misguidedly wish to blame on others.

The solution to their problem does not lie in protest. It lies, quite simply, in greater application, diligence and tenacity of purpose. It does not follow that a failure to appreciate this in the past means that Muslims cannot shake themselves out of their present inertia, or cannot work more strenuously towards judiciously chosen goals.

It is my earnest desire that Muslims, whatever their condition, should display the utmost tolerance — unilaterally, if need be — for no plans for reconstruction can materialise without their doing so. If Muslims wish to make up for their

backwardness in educational and economic fields, the suppression of the protest mentality is *sine qua non.* Only if they learn to bear all kinds of afflictions with patience and fortitude will they gain the period of respite they need in which to engage in their own reconstruction. Unilateralism of this sort is the price they shall have to pay for their own uplift. No one else is going to pay this price for them.

STRANGE PSYCHOLOGY

One notable instance of this very strange psychology was their response to the setting up in Calcutta of the first medical college in India by Lord William Bentinck in 1935. Because of their hatred of the English 'usurpers and conspirators,' the Muslims led a procession through the streets to protest against the opening of this college, and demanded that it be closed. There then ensued the strange spectacle of other communities thronging to seek admission, while Muslims clamoured for its closure. By adopting this negative stance, Muslims lagged more than 100 years behind other communities in medical science.

This event is symbolic of the causes of the Muslim dilemma in the world of today. And there is no sign of any abatement of this general negativism. Surely they must one day realize that the prejudice and discrimination which they so loudly decry would rapidly disappear if they were simply to apply themselves with the utmost dedication in the academic and economic fields. In this way they would remove the obstacle of their own backwardness, and, with that, the stigma of intellectual and social inferiority. This accomplished, they would be able, as an updated and self rehabilitated community, to stand shoulder to shoulder with the most advanced nations of the world.

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MUSLIMS AND THE SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION

Some say that the Muslims are backward in scientific education because their religion discourages them from acquiring it, or, at least, does nothing to encourage them to do so. But this is far from the truth.

Innumerable verses from the Qur'an and many sayings of the Prophet can be quoted which explicitly urge their readers to delve deeper into the mysteries of the earth and the heavens. How then is it possible that with such exhortations enshrined in their most sacred literature, Muslims, for whom Islam was and is a living thing, should not have engaged themselves in the observation of nature? It almost goes without saying that making a study of nature is to discover the Creator in His creation. That is the most wonderful benefit to be derived from such a study. Looked at in another way, in terms of worldly activity, the carrying out of research into the phenomena of nature, and body of knowledge to be gained from it, is what we commonly regard as science.

Moreover, Muslim history itself contradicts the supposition that Islam is an obstacle to scientific investigation. On the contrary, history testifies to the fact that, in the early Muslim period, great advances were made in various branches of science. In a period when Europe had not taken even one step forward in the sciences, Muslims had achieved phenomenal progress in these fields. Bertrand

Russell has acknowledged this fact in these words:

Our use of the phrase 'the Dark Ages' to cover the period from 600 to 1000 marks our undue concentration on Western Europe. In China this period includes the time of the Tang dynasty, the greatest age of Chinese poetry, and in many other ways a most remarkable epoch. From India to Spain, the brilliant civilization of Islam flourished. What was lost to Christendom at this time was not lost to civilization, but quite the contrary. (*A History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell, p. 395)

This fact has been universally acknowledged by historians. But this is not all that there is to the matter. We must go one step further, and add that the modern sciences are the very creation of Islam. I do not mean to say that Islam was revealed for the purpose of science. But there is no doubting the fact that the scientific revolution is a by-product of the Islamic revolution. This relation between Islam and science has been acknowledged by Briffault in these words:

> The debt of our science to that of the Arabs does not consist in startling discoveries of

revolutionary theories; science owes a great deal more to Arab culture, it owes its existence. The ancient world was, as we saw, pre-scientific. The Astronomy and Mathematics of the Greeks were a foreign importations never thoroughly acclimatized to Greek culture. The Greek systematized, generalized, and theorized, but the patient ways of investigation, the accumulation of positive knowledge, the minute methods of science, detailed and prolonged observation and experimental inquiry were altogether alien to the Greek temperament. Only in Hellenistic Alexandria was an approach to scientific work conducted in the ancient classical world. What we call science arose in Europe as a result of a new spirit of inquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, of the development of Mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks. That spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs. (*Making of Humanity,* Briffault, p. 190).

WORSHIP OF NATURE

It is an academic and historical truth that Islam is the creator of modern science. What is science? It is simply the name of the study of nature. Since time immemorial, since man has existed in this world, he has been observing nature. Then what explains the delay in studying and conquering it? All the developments of science have taken place only within the span of the past one thousand years, whereas they should have come into existence millions of years ago. It was the dominance of animism *(shirk)* in ancient times that hindered man from studying nature, discovering its forces and utilizing them.

What is animism? It is worship of nature, says Arnold Toynbee:

> (For the ancient man) Nature was not just a treasure-trove of natural resources, but a goddess, Mother Earth. And the vegetation that sprang from the earth, the animals that roamed the earth's surface, and the minerals hiding in the earth's bowels, all partook of nature's divinity. So did all natural

phenomena, springs and rivers and the sea-mountains, earthquakes, and lightening and thunder.

Everything on earth and in the sky, — the trees, the stars, the sun — all that seemed extraordinary, was thus regarded as being imbued with divinity. Such is the stuff of animism. And it was ideas such as these which dominated the human mind throughout much of the inhabited world before Islam.

To ancient man, nature was an object of veneration. How then was it possible for it to become an object of investigation? Herein lies the real reason for ancient man's disinclination to make a study of it.

Having accorded nature the status of divinity, man then proceeded to worship it. Such reverence became an obstacle to investigation. Bending nature to the ends of civilization obviously became an impossibility.

Arnold Tonybee has acknowledged that this prolonged age of nature worship was put an end to for the first time by Monotheism. The faith of

monotheism led man to realize that nature, far from being the creator, was merely the thing created. It was a thing to be exploited — not a thing to be worshipped. It was meant to be conquered not revered. This concept of monotheism, which had fallen into desuetude, was revived by Islam, hence the revolution in modern human thought is directly traceable to Islam. There is no doubting the fact that the message with which all of the prophets had been sent was that of pure monotheism. In very age, every prophet had preached monotheism pure and simple, but never in human history had it been possible before Islam to bring about a revolution on such a basis. That is why it was only with the advent of Islam that man could share the fruits of monotheism.

While we accept that all the prophets were the harbingers of true Monotheism, we have to admit that their followers failed to preserve their religious teachings in the original form. Their main error was to adulterate this true concept with polytheism. For example, Jesus Christ perpetuated the tenets of monotheism, but his followers accorded the status of divinity to Jesus himself.

This distorted belief in many ways retarded scientific progress. For instance; when certain astronomers carried out research on the solar system, and came to the conclusion that the earth revolved around the sun, they were severely opposed by Christian clergymen, the reason being that their beliefs were misguided. If the earth was truly the birthplace of the Son of God, it seemed to them unthinkable that such an earth could possibly be a mere satellite instead of being the centre of the solar system. In order to defend their distorted beliefs they refused to acknowledge the scientific fact.

THE ROLE OF ISLAM

Where the previous prophets of old had gone no further than proclaiming the truth, and had not been able to bring about a revolution on the basis of their teachings, the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions made monotheism a living concept. They were the first such group ever to bring about such a revival in human history.

First of all, they completely eradicated all forms of polytheism and animism in Arabia, and based their

lives, in practice, on monotheistic belief. Then they forged ahead to replace polytheism with monotheism throughout the known inhabited world. They destroyed all the idols and the edifices which protected them in the lands that they conquered in Asia and Africa, thus giving monotheism its place on a universal scale. This fact has been acknowledged by Orientalists. We quote here from Michael Hart's book, *The Hundred: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*, published in New York. Of the Prophet, it says:

> He was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.

This universal monotheistic revolution brought about by Islam made it possible to bring the age of superstition to an end. The phenomenon of nature was displaced from its pedestal of worship for man. Everything else was a mere object of creation.

An American Encyclopaedia rightly says of Islam:

> Its advent changed the course of human history.

With the ousting of the phenomenon of nature from its place as an object of worship, it immediately assumed its rightful role — an object of investigation and conquest. This process originated in Medina in the 7th century AD, then was passed on to the centres of the Muslim empire, Damascus and Baghdad, later crossing the sea and entering Spain and Sicily. It surged even further forward and reached Italy and France. This historical process continued till the modern scientific revolution was brought to maturity. The modern western revolution of science is thus the culmination of the Islamic revolution.

MUSLIMS OF TODAY

Now a question does arise here. How is it that the Muslims of today, who are the followers of that same Islam which taught science to the whole world in its initial stages, are at present lagging far behind others in scientific education? The sole reason is political. The scientific revolution brought about by Muslims in their initial stage of growth was diverted to other western nations via Spain. Afterwards most of the progress in science was made by Europeans.

Although, during this time, most parts of the world still politically remained in the hands of the Muslims, scientific development was continuously going on in Western Europe after the crusades. The major advances in the field of science by Muslims at this early stage of their development ultimately took concrete shape in their victory at the end of the crusades which lasted 200 years from 1095 to 1270. In these wars almost the whole of Europe unitedly attacked the Muslim world in order to recapture their holy places from it, but to no avail. On this subject *Pears Encyclopaedia* says:

> Millions of lives and an enormous amount of treasure were sacrificed in these enterprises. And when all was done, Jerusalem remained in the possession of the ‘infidels.’

The end of the crusades meant total victory for Muslims and total defeat for Christian Europe. Paradoxically, the victory, far from being a great gain, proved to be a great setback for Muslims. The Christians, in spite of their total defeat, were the greatest beneficiaries. This was because the Muslims fell to rejoicing over their victory and,

becoming complacent, neglected to remain alert to the movements of the enemy. The gratification that came with such phenomenal success was enough to slow, if not destroy, all potential development.

Christian Europe, on the other hand, greatly benefitted from its defeat. There began a process of rethinking among them which made them conscious of their weakness and of the necessity to obviate them. Such was the thinking of those who openly advocated the necessity to learn Arabic, the language of the Muslims, and to translate all the important books from Arabic into Latin. This movement quickly gained ground, and most of the books by Muslim scholars were indeed translated into Latin, the academic language of Europe in those days.

This process went on for many centuries. While Muslims were savouring their success and wasting their energies, Christian Europe had taken up the challenge in real earnest — launching 'spiritual crusades' as they termed it — and having thrown themselves into the task with such enthusiasm and energy, they made consistently good progress.

This journey of Europe continued till 18th-century achievements made it obvious to all and sundry that Europe had left the Muslims far behind. Western Europe was now leading the world in modern science and technology. It replaced the hand by the machine. Manual labour was now replaced by mechanization. Moreover, it invented long-range weapons greatly in contrast to the old style of weapons which were only suitable for hand-to-hand fighting. First it held sway over the land, then the sea, then the air. Man and animal power gave way to the machine, sail gave way to steam and, finally, heavier-than-air matter was lifted off the ground. With such land, sea and air power, the west had become a force which the Muslims could not fend off with their existing means and resources. Thus equipped with all the paraphernalia of modernity, the west entered into the Muslim world, the Muslims, in their state of inertia, failed to arrest their advance. The western nations, directly or indirectly, quickly gained control over the whole of the Muslim world.

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE

In centuries gone by, Muslims had lagged behind in science as a result of the complacency which had set in after their political victory in the crusades. Now in the present world, the same backwardness has taken another form. The political subjugation of Muslims by western nations from colonial times onwards had brought with it a negative reaction against their enemies. The western nations had taken away their pride, so the Muslims came to hate them. Because of this negative psychology, they not only opposed the western nations, but also their languages and sciences. Much of this attitude persists today.

A whole century was frittered away during the colonial period in futile opposition. Muslims continued to despise western nations and waged war against them, which, because of inadequate preparation on the part of the Muslims, only ended in defeat. On the other hand, other communities of the world were rapidly learning Western Languages and sciences and it was inevitable that a big gap should have developed between the

Muslims and the other communities, one example of which can be seen in India. Kuldip Nayyer has written that Muslims are two hundred years behind in education as compared to their Hindu compatriots. Even if we feel that Nayyer's estimate is somewhat exaggerated, we shall still have to concede that Muslims are at least one hundred years behind.

The sciences cultivated by western nations were not simply sciences; they were the foundations of all kinds of progress in the modern world — the power of the day. That is why all those nations who bent their minds to those sciences made advances. The western nations and their followers became far superior in culture and civilization to Muslims.

A VERBAL CONTROVERSY

Latter-day Muslim reformers, who have recognised the need to propagate modern sciences and western learning amongst Muslims, have, by and large, based their arguments on verses from the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet which lay stress on the importance of learning *(al-'ilm)*. Such arguments, far from proving definitive, have stirred up

controversies between religious and secular scholars, the former holding that those verses and sayings of the Prophet which emphasize the acquisition of learning refer to religious learning, and not to worldly sciences with their connotations of materialism. Muslim reformers insist that injunctions on learning refer to both the religious and the secular knowledge. This controversy, which began a century ago, shows few signs of being resolved.

So far as the verses which deal with learning are concerned, there is surely room for both interpretations. But no matter whether one group takes them to apply to religious learning while another group relates them to secular learning, the importance of modern science simply cannot be denied. It may be an object of heated controversy, but its final acceptance is just as important to Muslims as it is to other nations and communities. Here is a verse from the Qur'an which not only approves of the acquisition of modern sciences, but which holds it to be the duty of Muslims to pursue them:

> Muster against them all the force and cavalry at your disposal, so that you may strike terror into the enemies of God (8:60).

We are therein commanded by God to make ourselves strong so that our adversaries may be overawed. The notion of strength *(al-quwwah)* in this verse applies, surely, to all things which, at any given time, confer power upon their possessors: this may be the power of ideas, or the power of material things — either or both, depending upon the exigencies of the times.

It is an indisputable fact that modern scientific learning is a force in this day and age. Today it is those nations which are advanced in science and technology which have real strength as compared with their more backward neighbours. We must be realistic and accept the fact that the awe inspired in one nation by another is to a very great extent the result of the acquisition of scientific learning.

Even if the importance of the modern scientific education is not underscored by the verses which deal with learning, it is certainly testified to by the verses which deal with the necessity for power.

Whether Muslims bow to the wisdom of the verses on learning or the verses on strength, it is clearly their bounden duty to create conditions which are favourable to the inception and growth of scientific education in their own community.

SCIENTIFIC CONSCIOUSNESS

The principal reason for Muslims’ backwardness in the field of science can be summed up in one phrase — lack of consciousness.

Just as the Indian landlord class was pushed into the background because of a lack of awareness in the field of business, so were Muslims left behind others because the scientific consciousness which ought to have developed in them had for various reasons been stultified. If they paid scant attention to science, it was partly because their respective attitudes towards religion and scientific education stood so at variance with each other. Aware of the importance of religious education, they made elaborate arrangements for its propagation on a large scale. But, since they did not grasp the importance of scientific education, they did little or nothing to set up an infrastructure for its

dissemination. Without this no nation can be adequately educated.

After a long period of intellectual stagnation, our leaders eventually realised the importance of such education and, rousing themselves from the state of inertia into which they had sunk they set up universities and colleges. What they failed to do, however, was to establish a network of primary and secondary schools which should provide a solid grounding in elementary education and eventually 'feed' the institutions of higher learning. Our predecessors had not neglected establishing religious schools at the elementary level, but their successor completely forgot to perform this all-important task.

In the past, when great religious institutions were set up, they could hope to draw on a countrywide network of schools for their student population. There is no village or town where there is not one or more such schools. It should be obvious that in the absence of such educational facilities our universities and colleges are bound to remain deserted, but Muslim leaders appear to have lost

sight of this very basic requirement. This is all the more surprising since the example of the large-scale efforts of Hindus and Christians was already there for everyone to see.

Muslims, for religious reasons, have always been disinclined to send their children to Hindu, Christian or government schools. In the absence then of Muslim schools of a good standard, these children have, through no fault of their own, been unable to qualify themselves for advanced studies. This shortcoming in the educational structure of the Muslim community — the result of negligence on the part of our leaders — has nipped many a bright young career in the bud, and has been a major factor generally in Muslims lagging behind others in scientific education.

FUNDAMENTAL NEGLIGENCE

Just as many of those who came under the domination of the English, failed, in their hatred of the conquerors, to differentiate between English and the English, coming to despise the language along with the people, so Muslims did not make the distinction between the men and their sciences.

Hating the conquerors, they rejected their learning. Had they been able to separate the two, the history of their own scientific achievement would have been very different. It is a mistake to think of science as being the private preserve of any particular nation. It is, after all, the study of nature, universal in its scope and applications, and a common asset of humanity. Nor is it purely a matter of tradition, whether ethnic or political.

The western nations were at the time of the crusades in the same situation as latter-day Muslims. At that time, it was the Muslims who bore aloft the torch of scientific learning while their adversaries had sunk into the intellectual sloth of the Dark Ages. It was, indeed, by virtue of this scientific learning that they succeeded in emerging triumphant from two centuries of arduous warfare. But, although the western nations hated their conquerors in the way that all vanquished peoples do, they did not commit the folly of rejecting their science, for they saw these sciences as being distinct from the individuals who purveyed them. Furthermore, owing to their diligence and perseverance, they were able to make such a

significant contribution to their development that, in the centuries to come, they became leaders in every field of those sciences. A time came when they succeeded in changing the whole course of human history.

The situation faced by Muslims in the modern world was no different. But in a situation where the west was the oppressor and the Muslims the oppressed, the latter allowed their aversion for the former to blind them to the virtues of the learning that the west had to offer. They failed to realize that this was not something national and traditional, but universal, the acquisition of which brought power with it. Had the Muslim leaders of modern times understood this in time, the destinies of their followers would have taken a vastly different course. Indeed, this was a fault of the moment, but its consequences shall have to be suffered for centuries to come. It is one of the great ironies of history that Muslims, because of their lack of consciousness, have become the losers not only in defeat, but also in victory.

In the 17th century AD when the whole world was

worshipping nature, Islam taught Muslims the lesson of conquering it. The Muslims of the initial period were profoundly moved by this teaching. For the first time in history they initiated the process of conquering nature. But later this process was diverted towards the West and Muslims, for various political reasons, receded into the background, till they had reached the point of scientific backwardness in which they are floundering today.

If the situation is to be saved, and the Muslim destiny is to be cast in the scientific mould, the most effective way is to bring Muslims back to the Qur'an. The day they rediscover the Qur'an, they will recover all the other things they have lost, including Science.

* * *

EDUCATION: KEY TO ALL SUCCESS

It is a widely accepted fact that present-day Muslims are faced with serious problems. It is also generally understood that the reason for this is the lack of leadership among the Muslims. But when

we view this issue in the light of the facts, we come to realize that this is a totally baseless supposition. The actual problem besetting Muslims is not the lack of leadership but the failure to follow the right leadership. Many leaders capable of giving sound guidance have been born among Muslims, but the community has ignored their words of wisdom. When a community does not follow an inspired guide, how can it benefit from the leadership he offers?

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) is one such example of a good leader, who gave clear guidance to his people, but who was not followed by the community as a whole — barring a handful of individuals. Later events testified to the validity and importance of his guidance, but his fellow Muslims, having dubbed him a *kafir* (infidel) and an enemy agent, were not at all inclined to give credence to his words. As such, they could not, and did not benefit from his advice.

In 1857, the Muslims waged a war against the British only to have a crushing defeat inflicted upon them. Not only did they fail to benefit in any way,

but they also lost whatever had survived previous upheavals. As a community the Muslims found themselves in an utterly ravaged condition. At the time of this tragedy, Sir Syed, who witnessed all the horror of it with his own eyes, was already a mature man of forty. He remained deeply affected by what he had seen, and in 1869-70, decided to travel to England to inquire into the reasons for the continuing dominance of the west and the state of subjugation of the Muslims. During his stay, Sir Syed learnt that the Muslim predicament was traceable not to enemy plots but to their own shortcomings, not the least of which was their failure to keep up with the rest of the world in the field of modern education.

It became plain to Sir Syed that the modern age was one of scientific revolution, a revolution in which European nations had already marched ahead. The Muslims, on the contrary, were in such a sorry state of backwardness that they could not even enter this field.

When Sir Syed returned from England, he found Muslim religious scholars and intellectuals busily

propagating the notion that the Muslims' real problem was political. That is, all their woes stemmed from the political dominance of the British, a dominance which would later be transferred to the Hindus. All Muslims were preoccupied with this thought and each was engaged in his own way in resolving the problem as if it were indeed political in nature.

Sir Syed was the first notability in modern India who pointed out that the Muslims' real problem was not political but educational. He therefore advised Muslims against actively joining in politics and urged them to concentrate instead on education. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1/369). This was the best possible guidance. But Muslims rejected this very proper advice. Instead of exerting themselves in the field of education, they persisted in political struggle. And when guidance goes unheeded, what benefit can accrue from it?

Let us compare this with developments in Japan. In 1945, Japan had an atom bomb dropped on it by the US, the latter country thus gaining political supremacy over it. Hirohito, who was at that time

Emperor of Japan, consulted his country's intellectuals and military officers on what their course of action should now be. The majority of them were of the view that, although their air force had been destroyed, the army had emerged unscathed, which meant that the war could be continued until political supremacy was regained.

Hirohito was a wise and educated person. He maintained that there was no use in continuing political and military confrontation and that they should rather devote all their energies to the educational front. Peace was a prerequisite if this goal of education were to be achieved. Delivering a speech on the Japanese radio, Hirohito said: 'We have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is unsufferable.'

After initial differences, the entire nation heeded the guidance of Hirohito. According education supreme status, they started on a grand scale the struggle towards its acquisition. As a result, within a period of just forty years after the Second World War. Japan has become the most educated society of

the world, and in consequence, the most developed and aware society too. In 1945 Japan had become one of the weakest countries of the world. Today the world is compelled to acknowledge it as one of the most powerful. It has, in fact, become an economic superpower. And all this was achieved by dint of a 50-year struggle made in the right direction as advised by a right-thinking leader.

The advice to abandon political confrontation and to work hard in the field of education was given to the Japanese by Hirohito in 1945. Exactly the same advice was given by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in undivided India to Indian Muslims 125 years before, in 1870. Yet the Japanese have now become a superpower, while Muslims are yet to become even a minipower.

The reason for this difference is not lack of leadership but failure to follow leadership. The Japanese accepted the direction given by their leader, paying full attention to the achievement of the goal he set them, but all Muslims could do was blame their leader. They rejected him on the score that his advice reeked of enemy plotting. The

Muslims continued to seek their future in the field of politics, instead of seeking it in the field of education. And those who are today engaged in this futile exercise will meet the same fate as that of the previous Muslim generations.

This problem will be solved only if Muslims stop blaming others, refrain strictly from entering the arena of confrontation and fully engage themselves in the acquisition of education. Learning is the key to all kinds of success. It is the only ladder to all kinds of progress. With learning, all else follows: without learning there is much to lose.

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MODEL MINORITY
THE ASIAN AMERICAN EXAMPLE

The problem of the minorities is one of the most vexed questions confronting India today. A great deal of administrative machinery has already been geared to the tackling of this issue and a whole spate of letters and articles, well-intentioned and otherwise, have appeared in the media, without, however, any neat, concrete solution having been

found. But have we looked at the problem from all possible angles? A glimpse at what is happening in other countries with minority problems would indicate that there is one line of action which has been almost totally neglected in India — that of self-help.

It is positively heartening to see what this has done for minorities elsewhere in the world. (Let us never forget that India does not stand alone in having such a problem). In the US, for example, the Asians settled there account for 2 per cent of the total population, but their success rate goes far and beyond their population ratio. It is true that the US, has provided them with opportunities which are available in very few other countries in the world, but it would be far from correct to say that it had solved the minorities' problems for them. Without the sustained personal efforts of the Asians themselves, success stories would have been few and far between. It is important to understand that it was this resolution and tenacity of purpose which brought them to the fore, and not the 'demand-and-protest' formula so beloved of the minorities in India particularly the Muslims. America's Asian

minority should serve as a model for the minorities of India. Their problems have equalled those of the Indian minorities in severity, but they have had the sense to open their eyes to the advantages all around them and to exploit them to the full. It is unfortunate that there are many people in this world who cannot or will not recognize an opportunity when it comes their way. As an English poet has observed:

> Two men looked out from prison bars,
>
> One saw the mud and the other saw stars.

If a class or community which considers itself disadvantaged or deprived goes through life seeing only the mud and never the stars, there is little hope of its making progress, with or without external encouragement considering that India's minorities seem to have spent a very long time concentrating their attention on the mud and doing very little reaching for the stars, they would do well to reflect that America's Asian minorities did not start off in any better a situation than they find themselves in today, and certainly had no ready-made sinecures ready and waiting for them. They had to start from

scratch in an alien environment, cut off from their roots and traditions. They had to ignore disadvantages, create their own advantages and then learn to exploit them. India's minorities, in sharp contrast to this, are living in their own land, in their own homes, with the support of centuries of tradition and culture behind them. Then what exactly are they waiting for?

The majority of the emigrants from Asian countries who have settled in America — the Asian Americans — belonged originally to China, Korea, Indo-China, etc., and when they first came to America, they could hardly converse in English at all, but, today, they are known as 'super students' in the best of America's English Schools. Although they make up only 2 per cent of the population, they have secured 20 percent of the places in American institutes of higher learning.

This state of affairs has given Americans much food for thought, and detailed surveys have been carried out to pinpoint the contributing factors. The results of this research have appeared in various publications such as the *Time* magazine (31 August,

1987), *Span* (December 1987), *Reader's Digest* (August, 1987) and *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi, 30 August, 1987).

WAY AHEAD

In every department of education, Asian Americans are ahead of their American counterparts. When Harvard Psychology Professor Jerome Kagan was asked to give his views on this subject, he said quite simply, 'to put it plainly, they work harder.' It is just a question of these people considering education as their passport to success. And there is no doubt but that the American system of education has proved to be just that. The price they have paid to have that passport is plainly unremitting toil.

This is the kind of performance which has allowed them to demonstrate their excellence and has secured them the position of a 'model minority' in the land of their adoption. But there was no question of their having found all avenues open to them. Racial discrimination was a major obstacle, it being quite common for American youths to poke fun at them and call them 'the yellow peril.' There were also repeated instances of their being the

objects of physical violence. But Asian Americans did not run away from this situation, and, what is even more important, they did not react by voicing protests and registering complaints. What they did do was put greater effort into whatever work or study they had undertaken. Their parents too helped them to stay away from the path of retaliation — which would have proved disastrous for them — and instead encouraged them to revere the work ethic. The atmosphere in Asian American homes was so success-oriented that if a boy scored 80% in a test, he would be asked 'Why not 85%.' And if he scored 85%, he would be asked, 'Why not 90%?'

Whenever a group is confronted with problems, there are generally two possible solutions. One involves self-help and greater diligence. The other — the one we see in India today — involves the constant registering of claims and protests, with the resultant head-on collisions. Opting for the latter policy does two kinds of damage, one being that, instead of solving the problem, it renders it more complex, and, therefore, more difficult of attainment. The other kind of harm which it does is

to cause the group to lose the respect of others. Any group which attempts to lay the burden of its problems upon others, is bound to appear self-seeking, paranoid and degraded. The behaviour of Asian Americans presents the opposite example.

NO REACTION

They discovered very early in their careers that the solution to their problem lay in shouldering the entire responsibility for their own destinies, and refusing to react even in the face of severe provocation. Living ordered lives, at peace with their neighbours, they were able to find the time, energy and mental balance to work much harder than others. Not only did this solve their own problems, but it brought an unexpected benefit to American society — a new competitive atmosphere. American youngsters who had slipped into idle ways because they had become over–complacent about the future, now found that if they were even to survive, they would have to work as hard as the Asian Americans. American intellectuals have been quick to acknowledge that this jolt given to their society has been healthy in its effect.

According to *Span* (December 1987) a middle aged man from New York said: 'Thank God for the Asians. They're bringing back standards to our schools (p. 32).'

The work ethic, which used to be considered a western concept, has now become the special preserve of the Asians. Young Americans are now being admonished to conform to 'Asian work ethics' if they wish to be successful in their careers. This notion would appear to be borne out by the fact that whenever Asian immigrants have had to compete with the general run of Americans, they have proved to be the better qualified. As such, their presence has acted as a spur to young Americans to work harder. It is no doubt a sobering thought that Asians, in one generation, have achieved what it has taken others three generations to accomplish.

Analysing the distinctive performance of Asians in the US, New York's University President is reported by *Span* to have said, 'When I look at our Asian-American students I am certain that much of their success is due to Confucianism.' Certainly,

Americans have reasoned that people who have begun to project such a high economic and intellectual profile within a relatively short period of time must have very special qualities of character to be able to do so, and this, in turn, has commanded a great deal of respect for what has developed those qualities, that is to say, the religion and culture of the eastern Asian countries.

If Confucianism can have such a salutary effect upon eastern Asians, cannot Islam lead Indian Muslims to even greater heights of achievement? After all, the Qur'an and Hadith lay similar stress upon hard work and self-sufficiency. It is related that the Prophet once refused to give a very poor man alms, and instead gave him a practical lesson in how to fend for himself. He asked the man what possessions he had and on being told that he owned only one sheet and one drinking vessel, he advised him to sell the latter and buy himself an axe-head with the proceeds. The man dutifully brought the axe-head to the Prophet, who fitted a haft on it himself. The Prophet then advised him to go and hew wood and sell it. In a few days time, the man came back to him, rejoicing that he now had much

more money than his cup had fetched him. The Prophet also admonished his companions never to ask help of others. He preached strict independence, and never encouraged anyone to become a burden upon society. For example, he said that even if one's whip fell down from the saddle, one should dismount from one's horse in order to pick it up, rather than ask anyone to hand it up to one. These are very simple examples, but they do illustrate the spirit which the Prophet tried to inculcate in his followers.

One might well ask what has happened to this spirit in modern times. It appears to have become submerged and forgotten in the kind of national and communal dispute which is constantly being provoked by shallow-minded leaders, who are more interested in their own popularity than in actual human uplift. If disputants could forget superficial differences and culiminate avoidable friction, they would set themselves intellectually free to pursue a more constructive line of action. Simply by basing their lives upon the eternal principles of Islam, they would be able to find the means to bring about a new revolution in this

country. In this manner, Muslims would not only solve their own problems but would give to this country a new standard which in time would come to be known as 'the Muslim work ethic.' Only when this happens, will Muslims establish themselves as an asset to this country, instead of the liability which they now are.

In order to re-integrate their cultural identity, Muslims have set themselves to launching one demand movement after another. To me, all such efforts are futile, because all cultural identity is something which cannot be achieved by just making demands. It is something which is generated by internal strength, something which makes its impact through the sum total intrinsic human qualities.

What Muslims should, more appropriately, aim at is a moral identity. Whatever distinction they hope to achieve should come from the willing, and conscious adoption of Islamic ethics. Once they have established their moral identity, their long sought-after cultural identity will, of itself, re-assert itself. This will come about quite independently of

the demand movements which are so fruitlessly being launched at the present time. Then Span's evaluation of the Asian presence in America — 'Their presence is going to be a great blessing for society' — may with justice be applied also to the Indian Muslims of today.

* * *

A STORY OF OUTSTANDING SUCCESS

Approximately 94,000 candidates from all over India sat for the preliminary test in the Civil Service examinations for the year 1986-87. Of these, a mere ten thousand proved themselves fit to take the main written examination, on the basis of which only seventeen hundred candidates were selected for interview. After this final screening process, the number of candidates chosen for high ranking national posts was whittled right down to 855.

The final results of these examinations were published in the national newspapers on June 8, 1987. After surmounting the various hurdles in this rigorous series of high-level, nation-wide examinations, the man who finally topped the list

was one Amir Subhani — a Muslim. This event in itself is quite adequate proof that there is no dearth of opportunities for Indian Muslims to prove their mettle and to be outstanding successes. Their way is not barred, as is so often alleged, by prejudice or partiality.

Muslims constitute approximately 12% of this country's total population. In strict ratio, Muslims should have numbered at least 100 out of the 855 who were finally selected for senior postings, but, in the final list there were only eleven. The idea generally prevalent among Muslims is that this scanty representation is the result of prejudice, but a closer scrutiny of the procedures of Civil Services Examinations shows that there is really no justification for this claim.

To begin with, the answer papers in the Civil Service written examination do not bear the candidates' names, but only code numbers. In this way, the examiner has no means of knowing to which community the candidates belong. After the written examination, an interview is conducted by a special board of five to seven

members, each of whom is an expert in his or her own field. If it were true that these members were bigoted in their outlook, then surely no Muslim would ever be selected at all for the IAS, let alone be allowed to go ahead and bag the top place. Even supposing there were some slight degree of prejudice in the examiner's minds, this would not be the deciding factor in the selection process.

This is thanks to the system of allotting 1800 marks to the Written examination and only 250 to the interview. This weightage rules out any foul play. Even if a candidate is unfairly treated at the interview, he still stands an excellent chance of being selected if he has had good marks in the written examination, because it is the aggregate that counts. No candidate is ever selected or rejected solely on the basis of the interview.

It is heartening to know that while Amir Subhani's marks in the written examination only came to 64%, in the interview he managed to obtain 74% — a clear 10% improvement on his showing in the written examination.

When asked how he had prepared for the Civil Service examinations, Amir Subhani said that, for six months prior to the examination, he had studied for twelve to fourteen hours a day. Even before this, he had been in the habit of studying up till midnight. Another important point he made was that he had done extensive extra-curricular reading of books, periodicals and newspapers, as well as concentrating on the required reading for his course.

If Amir Subhani had an outstanding success it was entirely due to the extraordinary amount of effort that he put into his work. In every examination that he had sat right throughout his life, from his matriculation right up to MA, it was always his own strenuous efforts which had secured him high marks. When he was asked what advice he would give to potential IAS candidates, he said that on the basis of his own experience, the best thing to do was 'work hard and never give up in your struggle to achieve your goal.'

There are two arenas in which Indian Muslims are capable of working. One is that of demands and protests. The other is that of hard work and

conscientious striving. While Muslim leaders have chosen the first arena, sterling individuals such as Amir Subhani have chosen the second.

Over the last half-century, Muslim leaders have seen fit to follow a policy of confrontation. Blaming others for all their difficulties, they have embarked on an unending protest campaign. People like Amir Subhani, however, have not in the meanwhile wasted their time in pointing the finger of accusation at others. Instead, they have set themselves to constant hard work in order to improve their positions, neglecting no opportunity which should happen to come their way.

This latter method has proved by far the most successful. While the policy adopted by Muslim leaders had failed to produce any positive results, those who have striven in the manner of Amir Subhani have gone from strength to strength. Their efforts have never gone to waste. Sooner or later they have borne fruit. Sooner or later they have led to success.

Which approach then should Muslims adopt? Clearly, they should follow the trail blazed by Amir

Subhani, for such is the path which will lead them to success. The path which their leaders are so anxious to show them should be shunned absolutely, for it is a path that will lead them nowhere.

* * *

MUSLIMS AND THE PRESS

The power of the press can be gauged by the use of the term 'The Fourth Estate' to describe it. Although its origins go far back in time it did not acquire the definite and effective form of an organized means of mass communication until the end of the 19th century, the first course in journalism being given at the University of Missouri, Columbia, from 1879 to 1884. Throughout the 20th century it has gradually gone from strength to strength.

By the end of the 19th century, the Muslims as a community had entered the field of journalism in earnest. Probably the first notable Muslim paper was
Al-'Urwatul Wusqa, brought out by Syed Jamaluddin Afghani and Mufti Muhammad

'Abduhu in 1883. Anti-British in sentiment, its objective was to unite Muslims all over the world as a means of putting an end to British colonialism.

Since that time, tens of thousands of magazines and periodicals have been brought out in a variety of Muslim languages. I myself have been reading Muslim periodicals in the original in three languages — Arabic, English and Urdu — and to some extent have read periodicals in other languages in translation. In this paper, I propose to make an evaluation of the Muslim press in the light of the considerable information which I have at my disposal. But first of all, a set of criteria shall have to be adopted by which we may judge the two basic aspects of journalism, namely presentation and content. I would suggest that our yardstick for presentation should be the Western press, and our criterion for content should be the Qur'an.

Setting up the Western press as a standard by which to judge the Muslim press on its presentation is perfectly justifiable, since no other press in the world can match its level of excellence. Judged by this standard, the Muslim press is so far behind in

every respect that assigning a place to it in the heirarchy of standards is simply not possible.

In terms of circulation, the Western press, with its direct access to global news, has already achieved an international status, whereas the Muslim press, with its dependence on indirect sources of information, suffers from such limitations as to make it barely of regional interest. Today the whole world looks to the Western press for international news, while the Muslim press is not, so far, an accepted source even of Muslim news.

This difference of standard between the two is underscored by the fact that, to date, all over the world, news of Muslim importance is sought after in the Western press, not only by non-Muslims but also by Muslims themselves. A recent instance of this reliance on the Western media was demonstrated during the period leading up to the signing of the agreement between Israel and the PLO on the subject of mutual recognition — surely one of the most important events of the Muslim world. Right from the beginning of the negotiations till the actual signing of the agreement in

Washington on September 13, the Western media, and not the Muslim press, remained the principal source of all information on this topic for both Muslims and non-Muslims.

One very important asset of the Western press is the high intellectual calibre of its staff, which is the main reason for the excellence of its academic and journalistic standards. Muslim journalism, on the contrary, has suffered from the general lack of awareness among Muslims which in turn has discouraged men of superior intellect from engaging themseves in the field.

In its failure to measure up to the high standards of the present day, the Muslim press has had little or no impact upon public opinion. It would be quite correct to say that it exists in name only.

Now let us examine the content of Muslim journalism from the standpoint of Qur'anic standards. It may seem strange to compare modern journalism with the scriptures, but this is not really so, for the writing of the Qur'an took place — without ascription — in the manner of modern journalism. That is, the contents of the Qur'an were

not revealed all together in the form of a book, but came in instalments — or as men of religion would say, in separate revelations — over a period of twenty-three years. So that the Qur'an was like a periodical which was started in 610 AD, reaching its completion only in 632 AD.

As well as providing the archetypal form for modern journalism, the Qur'an had the selfsame objectives as those of our modern press, namely, to guide people at critical moments, to help solve their problems and to set the course for their thinking and action. Now let us see what method was adopted in the Qur'an over this period of twenty-three years.

The revelation of the Qur'an started in ancient Mecca. At that time, a number of pressing issues presented themselves not only in Mecca but throughout Arabia. For instance, the holy Ka'bah housed 360 idols. The Roman and the Iranian empires had made political inroads into Arabia. There were many evils, and crime was widespread among the tribes. Yet the first commandment revealed in the Qur'an made no reference to any of

these problems. On the contrary, the first commandment of the Qur'an was, *'iqra'* (read).

Given Arabia's condition at that time, it might have been expected that the first verse of the Qur'an would be either a protest, or a command to wage war. But it was not. Instead, the Qur'an gave the very positive injunction to 'read!' In other words, to think positively in the face of adversity. Let others follow the path of destruction: one's own course should be that of construction. It was strong in its advocacy of the power of peace as opposed to that of violence. It guided the oppressed to shun the path of violence in favour of adherence to the principle of non-violent activism.

This means that the first part of the Qur'an counsels against head-on confrontations in the attempt to deal with life's problems. Instead, it advises trying to get at the root cause of the trouble. The most obvious root cause of many problems is the lack of perception and judgement which stems from poor education, or no education at all. With the spread of education, this ignorance, which underlies so much of the evil in the world today, could be banished.

This in turn would facilitate the solution of many different kinds of problems.

A similar revelation was made on the occasion of the Hudaybiyyah controversy, when Meccan leaders refused to let Muslims enter Mecca for the performance of 'Umrah (a minor pilgrimage, which can be performed at any time of the year). This revelation in no way incited the Muslims at that point in time to wage war against the enemy. Instead, it enjoined the Muslims to adopt the path of avoidance in order to counter the display of arrogance and prejudice on the part of the Meccans, and to go back after entering into a peace treaty with them. Thus, on such a delicate and sensitive occasion, Muslims were advised that the power of peace was greater than the power of war. They were advised, therefore, to forsake the path of war and taste the fruits of peace.

Judged by Qur'anic standards, Muslim journalism falls far below par. While the Qur'anic 'periodical' was run on positive lines, the entire Muslim press of the present day is plunged in negativism. Where the Qur'an stressed the importance of action and the

avoidance of reaction, present-day Muslim journalism as a whole is oriented towards and motivated by reaction. During the last days of the Muslims in Mecca (shortly before the emigration) when they had been cruelly persecuted by the Meccan non-Muslims, this verse of the Qur'an was revealed: 'Truely with hardship comes ease, truely with hardship comes ease' (94:5-6). That is to say that for this world God has decreed that facility, or ease, should exist side by side with difficulty and hardship. You should, therefore, ignore difficulty, seek opportunities and avail of them. But today Muslim journalism has devoted itself entirely to the ferretting out of difficulties, mainly plots and conspiracies of others against them.

If we were to place the revelations of the Qur'an on a parallel with the investigative, informative, and advisory functions of the modern press, the most appropriate, although anachronistic term for them would be 'constructive journalism'. Where the parallel ends is in the failure of modern Muslim journalism — unlike the Qur'an — to be constructive. I would say that, on the contrary, it is run on the very opposite principle.

Hundreds and thousands of newspapers and periodicals are brought out by Muslims but, although they all appear under different titles, they might well be lumped together under the single title of ‘Protest’. If we substituted ‘Protest Daily,’ ‘Protest Weekly,’ ‘Protest Monthly,’ for their original titles, this would in no way be inappropriate to their contents.

In the light of Qur’anic wisdom, the true role of the press should be constructive, not expostulatory. Protest is nothing but a negative reaction which, with constant repetition, builds up a paranoid mentality. It encourages peevishness and irritability, which are hardly the mental states we need for a positive, practical struggle. Of course, we need our press to have a powerful reach, but it must cultivate the kind of constructive thinking which will lead to a re-generation of the Muslim community. Regeneration can come about only through self-construction. It can never result from the mere lodging of protests against others.

Now, the question arises as to how the Muslim press developed into a medium of protest. In the

19th century, when the power of the press was building up, that was the very time that the Muslims were divested of political power. It was this concatenation of events which produced the mindset due to which the entire Muslim press has taken the shape of an organ of protest in modern times. This is the reality, but Muslim leaders, then and now, have projected the loss of power as a matter of usurpation, brought to fruition by plots and conspiracies. It is surely a law of nature that those who make progress are entitled to a position of dominance. The reverse is also necessarily true. So why should the Muslims consider themselves an exception to that rule? If they remained backward, they deserved to fall from power. Muslim leaders, however, unwilling or unable to face the facts, traced the decline of their community to the machinations of the West.

It was this rigidity of thinking which turned past and present Muslim journalism into a platform of protest. Almost all Muslim newspapers and periodicals, steeped as they were in such ideas, became engaged in vociferous outbursts against all Christian, Jewish and European powers. The real

task to be performed, according to them, was the continual registering of complaints.

Had the Muslim leaders been of a different mentality, they might have made a more profound study of the situation; they would then have discovered that the subjugation of the Muslims was, in fact, due to their own inability to progress with the times. This would have resulted in their urging the press to devote itself to Muslim reconstruction. Journalists would then have worked towards bringing about an awareness among Muslims of the need for modern education. Only in that way would their feet have been set on the path of progress. Only then would they have realized that it was the time for self-preparation rather than the time for *jihad*.

That would have been the correct approach. Had Muslim leaders and journalists subscribed to this way of thinking, they would have impressed upon their public how imperative it was for them to remain patient in the face of Western dominance, and to devote all their time and energy to the field of construction. Modern circumstances demanded

patience, but Muslims could think of nothing but protest.

Today, Muslims — Indian Muslims in particular — place continuing emphasis on having their own press in English. Its aim, according to them, is the proper presentation of their case before other nations. It is probably due to this mentality that we see the unique phenomenon, unparalleled in any other community, of a number of papers being brought out with purely communal or national titles, such as, 'The Voice of Ummah,' 'Muslim Outlook,' 'The Call of the Ummah,' etc.

The reason for such papers to have purely communal titles is traceable to the image the Muslims cherish of themselves as being faultless and above reproach. When their shortcomings and excesses have been pointed out by national newspapers and periodicals, they have felt — consciously or unconsciously — that that was not a true picture of them, and as a matter of self vindication, they wanted to publish papers which would correct what they felt were erroneous impressions by projecting Muslims as absolutely perfect, but ill-treated human beings.

It is significant that papers of this sort published in English over the last fifty years have either failed and ceased publication, or, if they are still in existence, take the form of highly abridged Muslim bulletins rather than full-fledged Muslim newspapers.

The reason for this failure is quite simple. Where the national press presents the Muslim cases as it is, as a totality, the Muslim press gives only half the picture. For instance, in the Bhagalpur riots in October, 1989, bombs were initially set off by Muslims. It was only after this that Hindus set fire to Muslim properties. The national press described the acts of both the communities, including the fact that the Hindu destruction of Muslim property had been on a much larger scale than the damage caused by Muslim bombs, yet, flying in the face of the facts, the Muslims wanted no mention of bomb-throwing. They wanted only the burning of their property by the Hindus to be highlighted. Similarly, when the Babari Masjid was demolished on December 6, 1992, the Muslims of Bombay wanted no mention of their subsequent rioting and destruction, which sparked off Hindu acts of

revenge, again on a much larger scale. They wanted facts damaging to themselves to be suppressed, so that they might appear to be the innocent, injured party.

This attitude extends to every important sphere of Muslim existence. For example, the number of Muslims in government service is very small, mostly because very few Muslims attain the necessary level of education. When this subject is covered by the national press, the paucity of Muslims in government office is underlined, but, at the same time, the reason for this — namely, their lack of education — is also stressed. The Muslims, on the contrary, want everyone to know that they are under-represented in government service, but they want all mention of their backwardness to be omitted.

Again, during the Afghanistan war, the national press gave equal credit to the valour of the Afghan Mujahidin and the assistance given by the Americans. The Muslim press, on the contrary, want to keep the Americans out of the picture — although the help they gave was quite

extraordinary — and give full credit to the Afghan Mujahidin. They act in this way because they want to prove that Muslims are entirely virtuous and innocent of all wrongdoing, and that if they appear to have shortcomings, it is because of the harsh treatment meted out to them by others.

It is on the basis of this kind of one-sided and partial news reporting that Muslims want to create their own press. What they do not realise is that the world for which they want to create such a press has neither any need of it nor any interest in it. Such papers, issued by Muslims are destined to be read by Muslims. In this world of cause and effect, such efforts cannot have any other result.

Another issue, which, despite massive coverage, the Muslim press has failed to influence, is that of Zionism vis-à-vis the Arab world. Over the last fifty years, Muslim journalists have devoted all their energies to writing against Zionism and the existence of Israel as a sovereign state, but to no avail. As a journalistic campaign, this was a complete failure. The Egyptian President Anwar Sadat recognised Israel in the Camp David

agreement in 1979, and although the PLO (the Palestine Liberation Organization) continued to reject Israel, it finally surrendered after a period of 14 years, giving its formal recognition to Israel at a function held in Washington on September 13, 1993. This event, the culmination of so many years of struggling for the very opposite outcome, is to the discredit of all sections of the Muslim press. It could neither avert the tragedy of Israel's being set up as a Sovereign state, nor could it lessen the pain of its consequences for the Arab world. The PLO's recognition of Israel ought to be an eye-opener for Muslim journalists everywhere. Now it is high time the basic weaknesses and shortcomings of the Muslim press were acknowledged so that it may be reshaped anew.

To me, the Muslim press has been suffering from what I can only call quite injustifiable self-righteousness on the part of Muslim intellectuals. It is this innate weakness which has prevented them from seeing their own shortcomings. All they can see is the plots of others behind every problem their community faces. Consequently, instead of engaging themselves in constructive activities, they

spend their time inciting members of their community to protest against others.

Journalism of this kind will only lull the community to sleep by providing it with doses of opium: it cannot become the means of its regeneration. This is the modern reality of the Muslim press. It must also be conceded that neither at the present nor in the near future can Muslims bring their journalism up to the standard of the day. One basic reason is that modern journalism is fed by industry, and that is a field in which Muslims have yet to find a noteworthy place. For this reason, it is my firm opinion that, at the moment, Muslims are in no position to achieve an international status for their press. That being so, what ought we to do? I think in this matter our first step should be to heed the wisdom of the old saying: 'Begin at the beginning.'

If we can adopt this realistic approach, we shall soon discover that, despite all deterrent factors, we are in a position to make an effective start on substantially improving the quality of Muslim journalism. By first setting aside the impossible, we must explore actual opportunities and from that

point make our beginning, for the right beginning guarantees the right end.

One vital step is to provide good training to Muslim youths, and help them to enter various newspapers and news agencies. Over the last few years, a certain number of young Muslims have entered these fields. But this has only happened sporadically as the result of their own personal motivation. There is no such general awareness of journalistic imperatives and opportunities in the Muslim community.

Another important point is that any community paper which is brought out should be of a very high standard. Moreover, Muslim periodicals should be published in the mother tongue of their readers, so that language may not prove an obstacle to bringing about an awareness of the times and a sense of commitment at the community level. They should also stop encouraging their readers to achieve their objectives by the continual lodging of protests and instead point the way to modern opportunities, with exhortations to make the best possible use of them.

It is essential to cultivate journalistic consciousness among the educated class of Muslims. This seminar constitutes an important step towards that goal and, as such, is highly praiseworthy. Efforts of this nature must continue and expand in their scope.

Muslim journalism's greatest shortcoming is that it presents no model of excellence to the young people of our community. Today, Muslim journalism is almost entirely of the "yellow' variety — hardly a shining example to give to budding journalists. The reason for its being of this hue is that, in the absence of any support from industry, it must resort to unscrupulous sensationalism in order to survive. There is really no alternative. That is the price that journalism pays for the Muslims' industrial backwardness.

Exemplary journalism can only be brought into existence by making sacrifices. If a team of educated Muslims could muster enough courage to bring out a model paper and, irrespective of recurring losses, continue to maintain its high standard, this would indeed be a welcome breakthrough as well as a great feat. In the present circumstances, there is no

other way to bring out a paper of quality.

To ensure that Muslims make an effective entry into the field of journalism, one positive and result-yielding step would be to open a Muslim school of journalism, which should conform to the hightest standards of the present day. One very necessary feature would be to have arrangements for journalistic training in all of the Muslim languages. If once such a school were to be established, journalistic progress could be achieved by leaps and bounds, because it would attract the very best of our young aspiring writers. With proper direction, effort, orientation and dedication, it could soon assume the position of an international institute.

3. MUSLIMS IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

At the request of certain educated Muslims and non-Muslims of Pune, I addressed a common gathering on November 6, 1991 on a topic of their choice, namely, 'Muslims in Post-Independence India.'

In preparation for this, I had to assess the Muslim condition from two different angles — the economic and the religious. As is my wont, I began to investigate the subject in a purely objective way. After considerable research, I discovered that, quite contrary to common belief, the Muslims lot has appreciably improved since partition in 1947. In fact, I found that any Muslim I picked out for assessment, or any Muslim settlement I made the subject of my research, was clearly in a better state than in the past.

It is true that Muslims are faced with certain problems and difficulties. But this should not be made into an issue, considering that in this world it is

hardly possible to have a completely problem-free life. A problem-free situation should not, therefore, be set up as the criterion by which to judge the condition of a group or community. It must be borne in mind that God's law for this world provides for difficulties and ease to exist side-by-side at all times. If this were not so, life's struggle would cease altogether. And a society bereft of struggle would no longer spawn living individuals; it would instead become the graveyard of the intellect.

Given this state of affairs, the Muslim condition cannot be judged by utopian standards. It should be judged rather by a set of realistic criteria based on what is patently possible.

In the course of my research, I gave little credence to articles on the subject published in Muslim journals and newspapers. Instead, I attempted to form an independent opinion based on my own knowledge and findings. My search led me to conclusions quite the contrary of the story that is constantly being repeated about the Muslims as if it were an axiom.

First of all, I went into the conditions of those misters and maulvis who are held to be the representatives of the Muslims in modern times. I found that each one of them — most of them are known to me directly or indirectly — had considerably improved his position in life after 1947. All leaders without exception, whether secular or religious, had a better standard of living than they had enjoyed prior to independence.

Then I assessed the position of my own, very large family. Again I found that all my relatives were in a far better state than hitherto. Then I looked at the Muslims in the various localities of my own hometown and in other cities too where I have stayed for some time, and still frequently visit. My observation of the Muslims living there again revealed that almost everyone has improved his standard of living in the post-independence era.

I spent several weeks investigating matters relating to this topic. Finally, I came to the conclusion that in the post-1947 era, Muslims have clearly made progress in this country. They are, today in a far better state than before.

During this period of research, I visited a Muslim acquaintance of mine who was born in a village in a farmer's family. After completing his education, he went on to become a gazetted officer. We often used to meet a few year ago, and each time he would complain that bias and prejudice in India left no opportunity for Muslims to progress. He would say, 'Just look at me. I have been an officer here in this department for several years, but I have never been promoted. The Hindu lobby bars the way to my advancement.'

After an interval of three years, I went to see him at his home. He had previously lived in a flat, but was now lodged in a spacious bungalow with guards and a host of servants. About ten acres of land with several different crops growing on it surrounded the bungalow, adding to its magnificence. I learnt that over the past two years he had had several promotions and was now very highly placed. It was due to his high position that he had been allotted this palatial bungalow

I stayed with him for about two hours, during which time he made frequent references — of

course, with pride — to his bungalow, his post, and so on. A few years prior to this, every-time we met, he could speak only of prejudice. Now he spoke only of his own greatness. It was this experience which made me understand the basic deficiency which has kept Muslims unaware of the actual state of affairs in the country. It is purely and simply the inability to recognise and come to grips with reality.

In life, there are good things and bad things. When an individual receives his share of the bad things — one of life's realities: he begins to complain about being the victim of prejudice. But when he receives his share of the good things, he considers this the result of his own capability and endeavour, and thus falls a prey to pride. He neither acknowledges the benefits he enjoys as a divine blessing, for which he should be grateful to God, nor does he look to his own shortcomings as the reason for his lack of success. In this way, he fails to see either the positive or the negative situation from the correct angle. What is worse is that he is highly vocal about his deprivations, while remaining silent about his share of God's material blessings. So that if gains are never mentioned (whether or not they are

appreciated as God's gifts) and only deprivations are emphasised, Muslim successes will never become public knowledge.

THE PROBLEM OF GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Regular attempts are made to prove that Indian Muslims suffer deprivation by quoting statistics or their minimal recruitment to government services. An English monthly, brought out in Delhi by Muslims, publishes data in almost every issue which gives the figure of two per cent as the Muslims share in public offices. It is held that with this very low percentage of recruitment, Muslims are grossly under-represented in the country's administration in terms of the proportion they make up of the national population, i.e. twelve per cent.

Arguments based on this data appear to be logically compelling, but the data itself leaves certain factors out of account, such as the backwardness of Muslims at the college and university levels of education. Eligibility for admission to government service requires candidates to be degree-holders

from institutes of higher learning, but the oft-quoted statistics make no mention of the fact that very few Muslim degree holders come forward to seek government posts.

Another factor left unstressed by the above statistics is the composition of the Muslim twelve per cent of the population. About half of this percentage is accounted for by women. That means that about half of the potential workforce is permanently out of the picture, because Muslim traditions are against women going out to work in government offices. In this way, half of the Muslim population is automatically deleted from the list of recruits to government service. This leaves 10 percent, but from that we have to subtract another 3 percent made up of those who are insufficiently educated. The two per cent ratio of Muslims in government services, albeit extremely low, does not then appear totally injustifiable. However, government services are no criterion to gauge the material prosperity of a community in a free, industrial society.

There are at least two definite reasons for this. One that the issue of recruitment to the services is

related to the government, and the wielders of power have always taken into account their own political interests in the allotment of posts in the services. Even if these rulers are personally sincere, they adopt, due to national and international considerations, a policy in regard to government service where the basis of decision-making is not simply prospering of a balance between the different communities making up the population, but the concessions are made to political imperatives. This is a state which exists in all societies and under all governmental systems.

For instance, the Sindhi Muslims of Pakistan complain that, in the central government services the Punjabi Muslims are over represented, while they themselves have several fewer posts than their ratio would actually warrant.

In India, too, such disparities exist at various levels. However, they do not exist only between Hindus and Muslims, but also between Hindus and Hindus. For instance, in appointments to high government posts members of the Brahmin cast far outstrip Hindus of other casts. Similarly, the

English-educated class bags more government posts than the Hindi-educated class. Muslims, for various reasons, also find themselves at a disadvantage, but this is a problem which is common to most groups and does not affect only the Muslims.

Perhaps a more telling point is that government service relates more to the processes of administration rather than to economics, accounting as it does for a mere two per cent of the distribution of the country's economic resources. There is a much vaster field outside administration in which people may earn a good living. Therefore if a group is only marginally represented in government services, it does not necessarily follow that it must remain economically deprived. There are innumerable fields open to those seeking employment, and it is quite possible that once they enter them, they may find them more lucrative than even the highest government posts.

Many historical examples can be cited in support of this viewpoint. One example in the recent past is the high level of prosperity attained by the Hindus in the state of Hyderabad, despite the marked

preference shown to Muslims in the allocation of government posts. This was because the Hindus had captured the fields of commerce and industry throughout the state. By engaging themselves in commercial pursuits they gained a far better economic position than they could ever have expected from positions in the administration.

For the above reasons, I conclude that the economic position of Indian Muslims should be judged not just by their ratio in government services, but by their success (or failure) in the spheres of commerce, industry, science and education. Mere representation in government services is no criterion by which to gauge their true economic worth.

* * *

In 1987 a marriage in our family was celebrated in Bombay, which was attended by more than fifty members of our family who had travelled by air to Bombay from Varanasi for the occasion. We were all put up at a hotel, and it was during this stay that one of my relatives came to my hotel room with a

copy of *Passive Voices,* written by Khalid Latif Gaba (1899-1981) a resident of Bombay. This book, first published in 1975, deals in 390 pages with the condition of Indian Muslims of the post-independence era. The very title of the book suggests that Indian Muslims are in a state of suppression. In his foreword, the author writes that 'it would be difficult to sum up the status and condition of Muslims in India better than in the two words: Passive Voices.'

Fully in agreement with the book's assertions, my relative began to hold forth on the persecution of Indian Muslims. I heard him out patiently, then told him that my views were the very opposite. To my way of thinking, Indian Muslims have improved their lot considerably since independence. I would go so far as to say that the condition of present-day Muslims is not that of persecution but of progress.

My relative was stunned into silence. I said, 'you are astonished because you yourself have become conditioned by what you read in our newspapers about Muslims. Your views have not been formed by direct contact with Muslims and you overlook

the fact that all our newspapers survive on yellow journalism. They do not convey the actual state of affairs, but concentrate rather on the negatively sensational.'

I asked him to take a critical look at his own economic and social position which I may say, was far better than it was prior to 1947. 'Today, fifty members of our family have come here by air to attend this ceremony. And we both know that, prior to 1947, our family was not in a position to celebrate a marriage on such a grand scale. At that time, in such a big family as ours there was only one car, whereas, today, there are more than a hundred.'

Indeed, if you make a survey of the economic and social condition of any Muslim family before and after 1947, you will see that it has made remarkable progress. If in pre-independence days, a Muslim owned a bicycle, today he owns a car. If, then, he had a small house, today he owns, if not a mansion, then at least a house of comfortable proportions. Where, before, he could only afford to telephone from a public booth, today he has his own telephone. Where his family had had to depend on

limited local opportunities, they now regularly travel and work abroad, and hold superior positions.

This may sound incredible, but it is something which can easily be verified by inquiring into the lives of Muslims in one's immediate neighbourhood. You can ask the Muslims participating in this meeting. You can go to Muslims, living anywhere and ask them what their economic condition was like before and after independence. You will find that there has been a considerable improvement in the standard of living of almost every family.

Even if you selectively survey Muslim writers, speakers, the self-styled champions of the Muslim cause, who proclaim the persecution of Muslims to the world you will find that each one of them has made 100-fold progress since 1947. I am personally acquainted with many of those so-called leaders, who belong to families who were poor prior to 1947 and who today, now, in this same country, are leading lives of considerable luxury.

Now let us turn from family economics to religion. In September 1991, I was in Lahore for a week. The first sound to reach my ears early in the morning used to be the voice of *azan* broadcast far and wide from the loudspeaker of a mosque. Exactly the same thing happens in India. I live in Delhi in Nizamuddin. Here, every day, the stillness of the morning is broken by the same call to prayer, which can be heard for miles around, thanks to the loudspeaker. The same is the case in other towns and cities.

If Lahore has its high-minaret Badshahi mosque, Bhopal has its Tajul Masajid minarets which are even higher. Moreover, there are upwards of three lakhs of mosques in India at the present time as compared to a far lower number before 1947.

Today there are lakhs of madrasas spread all over the country. The old madrasas, like those of Nadwatul ‘Ulama in Lucknow and Darul Uloom in Deoband, were just like ordinary schools before 1947, whereas today they have expanded so much that they have more the appearance of being universities. In the neighbourhood of Malegaon, a

new and very big madrasa, the Jamia Muhammadia, has been established, which completely dwarfs the old one. Hundreds of new madrasas have been established all over the country, including a school for Muslim girls, the Jamiatus Salihat at Rampur, which is said to be the biggest madrasa for Muslim girls in the entire Muslim world. In fact, thousands of Islamic institutions of different kinds have been set up throughout the length and breadth of the country, and have full freedom of functioning.

The Tablighi Jama'at is a Muslim religious movement headquartered in Delhi. Since 1947, its extension, too, has been exponential. In the same way, all other Muslim bodies have greatly added to their assets as well as increasing the numbers of their followers. In former times, Islamic conferences were few and far between, but nowadays, major conferences are being organized almost on a daily basis in India by Muslims. These take up different aspects of Muslims and Islam. Islamic books and journals are also being published in far greater numbers than ever before.

What has gained momentum in India since 1947 is not, in fact, the persecution of Muslims, but yellow journalism and an exploitative leadership which sustains itself by repeated allegations of persecution. If there is any danger to Muslims in this country, it is only from our so-called leadership, buoyed up as it is by paranoid journalism. There is no other real danger to Muslims.

Those who hold the reins of leadership and journalism in their hands are people of a very shallow character. Their only formula for boosting circulation and retaining their leadership is to create a fear psychosis among Muslims and then to exploit it. To this end, they painstakingly select negative instances from Indian Society and then, by blowing them up out of all proportion, they manage to convey the erroneous impression that Indian Muslims are the victims of prejudice and injustice.

I shall illustrate my point with an example from Bombay. In February 1989, the Muslims of Bombay were incited by their leaders to protest against the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* by leading a large procession through the streets. This

procedure was in violation of the law. As a result, firing was ordered and some Muslims were killed. Tales of police cruelty continued to be published in the newspaper for several months thereafter.

It does not take much probing to discover that this tragedy accrued only because of the exploitative nature of our leadership and journalism. It is well known that under Rajiv Gandhi's leadership, India was the first country (even before Pakistan) to ban this book. Now we have to ask why it was found necessary to lead a procession against it in India. After the official banning of the book, the Muslims should rather have held a meeting to thank the Indian government. They should have felt grateful to be in a country which had placed a ban on an anti-Muslim book, even before Muslim countries had done so, rather than court disaster for themselves in the streets.

The truth is that despite the progress made in all fields by Muslims since independence, our yellow journalism incessantly plays up the angle that they are the victims of persecution. The success of such journalism in dulling Muslim minds to the extent

that they actually feel persecuted is truly quite lamentable. It is time Muslims grasped the fact that their feelings of backwardness are more a matter of skewed psychology than of hard reality.

It has to be conceded, of course, that there are certain departments where Muslims lag behind other communities, for instance, in their recruitment to and promotion in government services. But this is nothing new. This state of affairs has persisted since the British era. The reason for this, again, may be traced to Muslim leadership rather than to the system of administration.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the British government made English the official language of the country instead of Urdu and Persian. English also became the medium of instruction in schools. At that time Muslim leaders hated the English, and they carried their hatred over to the English language too, failing to make the difference between the English and their language. They became the enemies of both the English people and the English language.

This mentality on the part of the Muslim leaders naturally affected the Muslim public. Muslims in general came to loath the English language and the sciences that were taught through the medium of English. This hatred was carried to such extremes that when Sir Syed (1817-1998) stressed the importance of learning English, he was upbraided as an agent of the British Empire, and was opposed tooth and nail He was thus effectively cutoff from the Muslim public. This resulted in Muslims falling about one hundred years behind other communities in English education. This is why, today, we have Arabic scholars of international repute, like Maulana Sayed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, but no Muslim writers in English who could hold their own on an international level.

There is, however, a ray of hope. A new way of thinking is emerging among Muslims, who are now rapidly entering the field of modern education and producing scientists like Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Dr. S.Z. Qasim, medical experts like Dr. Khalilullah and economists like Professor A.M. Khusro etc. Muslim youths such as Javed Usmani and Amir

Subhani have shown their mettle by topping in IAS examinations.

I am certain that within one generation, *Insha Allah,* this gap will be bridged, and then no one will complain that the ratio of Muslims in government services is very low.

A particularly dark aspect of the Muslims' existence in India seems to be communal riots. It is a fact that communal riots have taken place on a large scale in modern India over the last forty-five years and, regrettably, in some parts are still continuing. I repeat, nevertheless, that the occurrence of communal riots is not linked to the system of governance developed after independence. It is related rather to the Muslims' own rabble-rousing leadership and yellow journalism.

What is the logic behind the riots? Let us again take an example from Bombay where, about twenty years before independence, an issue was made of a Hindu procession passing by a mosque. As it approached the mosque, the Mutawalli (the keeper of the mosque) objected to its passage, and tried to

stop it. When his request was not complied with, he registered a case in a Bombay court, demanding that a court order be issued, banning any Hindu procession in future in front of the mosque.

At that time Muhammad Ali Jinnah was living in Bombay, and it was he who acted as advocate for the mosque keeper. The judge, an Englishman, ordered that the relevant prohibitory notice be put up near the mosque in question. This successful advocacy of their case by Jinnah so enthralled the Muslims that they dubbed him *Qaid-e-Azam*, the great leader.

But this was not leadership. It was more like leading the people astray. Jinnah should have told the Muslims that the solution to the problem of processions is not to try to stop them, but simply to ignore them. And that even if you manage to carve out a separate area of your own, as was done in the formation of Pakistan, there is no guarantee that processions will not again be led through the streets. The truth is that the choice for Muslims did not lie between having, or not having processions. It was between tolerating processions

or having riots. But the Muslims self-serving leadership and irresponsible journalism did nothing to steer Muslims away from wrong choices. As a result, in a bid to stop Hindu processions, riots have broken out from time to time in various places, with little hope of their ever ceasing in certain parts. Most of the riots in both India and Pakistan have this as their root cause.

To underscore the importance of this matter, I launched a constructive campaign about twenty five years ago to inculcate the idea in the Muslim mind that the solution to communal riots does not lie in confrontation, but in holding oneself aloof, refusing to rise to the bait of provocation, maintaining a strict and dignified silence.

Now, after a 25-year struggle, its effects can be seen, by the grace of God. At hundreds of places in India, communal riots have not taken place only because Muslims, on account of their new way of thinking, have adopted the policy of ignoring processions rather than trying to stop them.

We had a recent example of this new attitude on September 22, 1991 when the Hindus of Madras took out their annual Vinayaka Chathurthi procession. The previous year, when this same procession reached Triplicane street, where a mosque is located, Muslims attempted to stop it and insisted on changing its route. The processionists, however, were adamant, and this led to such a build-up of tension on both sides that a communal riot ensued. The police resorted to firing in which two Muslims were killed and many injured. Several shops and houses were damaged. The increased tension and hatred between the two communities was an additional harm done by the riot. It was because of this bitter experience that the Muslims of Madras decided this year to adopt the policy of avoidance of conflict. Although the same tense situation could have developed as on the previous occasion, thanks to the shouting of provocative slogans by the procesionists as they reached Triplicane street, there was no clash and no violence. This was because the Muslims stuck to their new policy of restraint. In the absence of any reaction from the Muslims, the Hindu procession

passed along the street without any harm being done to Muslims' lives and property. Where before Muslims had considered it their personal responsibility to see that no slur was cast upon Islam, they now, very correctly, left this to the police.

This event was recorded in *The Hindu* of September 26, 1991. Congratulating the Muslims on their self-discipline, it wrote: 'On this occasion, in spite of all provocation, the minority community showed great restraint.'

This new thinking that has been born among Muslims in regard to communal riots will, *Insha Allah,* become more and more deep-seated, until there will come a time when the feeling of insecurity suffered by the Muslims will be dissipated forever. They will march ahead towards progress, making their contribution not only to their own community, but to the country as a whole.

4. CURE FOR COMMUNALISM

WHY DO MUSLIMS FEEL INSECURE?

Whether a community feels secure or insecure is a wholly relative matter, depending as it does upon the actions of the concerned community, rather than on external circumstances. Its position in society, secure or insecure, is determined by its own behavior.

Compare, for example, the Christian communities of India and Sudan. Both are tiny minorities, the former comprising three percent of Indian population and the latter just two percent of the Sudanese population. It might be expected that such small minorities would live with a feeling of unease vis-à-vis the overwhelming majorities of their respective countries, and this is certainly true of the Sudanese Christians, who are dogged by a sense of insecurity. The Indian Christians, on the contrary, feel themselves fully secure.

What is the reason for this difference? It is because the Indian Christians were fortunate enough to

have been guided by their leaders into non-controversial constructive fields, and as a result of their strivings over a period of 200 years they have managed to build an educational empire in India. Moreover, health and welfare institutions set up by them are now widespread and functioning on a large scale, while the country is dotted with their religious establishments.

All these factors have ensured the safeguarding of Christian community interests in the country. The Christian community has thus managed to figure more prominently on the national scene than its small percentage of the total population would seemingly warrant. It is its very usefulness as a community which has ruled out any question of insecurity.

The Christian community in Sudan is quite differently situated. Its leaders, interested more in politics than in constructive activities, launched a movement aimed at separating a part of Sudan from the rest of the country in order to carve out an independent Christian State. This policy gave rise to hostilities between the Christian community on the

one hand, and the majority and the government on the other hand. Strict measures were then taken to crush the secessionists. Far from resulting in a separate Christian State, all that this political confrontation achieved was a spate of protests and complaints against the Government by the writers and speakers of the Christian community. If they are now a backward and insecure minority in Sudan, it is for the simple reason that their efforts have always been confrontational rather than constructive.

Indian Muslims are in a similar, if not worse situation, although the problem is of a much greater magnitude in the north of India, where their feeling of insecurity is most intense. Recurring communal riots are the greatest indication of this feeling, but it is the Muslim community itself which is the worst hit on these occasions, as was evident in the horrific communal riots which broke out after 1947 in North India, particularly in UP and Bihar.

The South Indian Muslims do not suffer from such feelings of insecurity as would lead to the outbreak of rioting. The only occurrences of rioting in South

Indian cities have been when one or more north Indian Muslims, having found their way into the region, have created a tense atmosphere with their provocative speeches. Even then, such disturbances have been on a very small scale. On the whole, it would be true to say that while a feeling of insecurity is commonplace in the north, the South is almost free of it, and therefore free, too, of rioting.

This dichotomy is on an exact parallel with the example of the Sudanese and Indian Christians. The large dose of politics administered respectively by their leaders to the Sudanese Christians and north Indian Muslims have led first to emotionalism and then to communal disaster.

South India presents quite the opposite picture. In this region, Islam was spread through merchants and travellers, in contrast to north India, where Islam was brought by rulers and soldiers. This is why the South Indian Muslims, unlike their brothers in the North, have never been swayed by emotional politics. Instead of flexing their muscles in political arenas, they have always exerted themselves in non-controversial fields like commerce and education. In

this way, constructive traditions have been established among the Muslims of this region.

It is this difference in northern and southern attitudes which accounts for the Muslims in one part of the country being prey to insecurity while the Muslims of another part continue to live in peace and security.

The only way for the Muslims of North India to banish this atmosphere of insecurity is to tread the same path as their South Indian co-religionists. That is, they must give up confrontation in favour of co-existence and adjustment.

For example, Muslims should neither obstruct Hindu processions nor should they become incensed when processionist raise provocative slogans. If Muslims fail to receive their due share of admissions to educational institutions, or of employment in Government Service, they should refrain from wasting their time in making protests and complaints and, instead, should work harder to improve themselves to the point where it will become impossible to ignore or reject them.

Wherever problems exist, opportunities also exist side by side with them. This is just as true of India as of any other country. But full use cannot be made of these opportunities unless the problems are thrust firmly into the background to grasp an opportunity which is the only way to success.

One receives in direct proportion to what one gives. This is a principle which Indian Muslims should never lose sight of. Rather than be as a group which does nothing but protest, they should become renowned for their creativity. In this way, they will become a viable force in the country. But this can only happen when they realize, once and for all, that nothing is ever achieved by political confrontations, demonstrations, etc., except the awakening of national prejudice, and all the negativism and destructiveness which flows therefrom.

If the Muslims can make such changes in their policy, the whole vitiated atmosphere will undergo a radical change for the better. A whole new world will come into existence. It will be just as if the problem of insecurity had never existed.

* * *

Any conflict has two perpetrators, and there are invariably faults on each side which cause and exacerbate it. It takes two to make a fight. If one party withdraws itself from the region of conflict then the other will remain alone there: it will have none to fight against and the conflict will disappear.

If, on the other hand, each party waits for peace initiatives to come from the other side before undertaking conciliatory moves of its own, then the mistrust between the two sides will continue to grow. The inevitable result will be escalation of the conflict between them.

Hindu-Muslim communal riots, which have become a regular feature of Indian life, are an example of such conflict, which can only be ended by unilateral action from one side. There are examples in the life of the Prophet Muhammad which show that it is the Muslims who should take this initiative. Worldly rivalry and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims means that the latter see Islam, not in its true light, but through the tainted vision of their own prejudice: Muslims are their enemies so they adopt an antagonistic posture

towards Islam as well This is a situation which should be intolerable to Muslims, whose overriding concern should be for the true message of Islam to reach other peoples in all its purity, and in an atmosphere conducive to objective and dispassionate consideration. Seeing that such an atmosphere cannot be generated where there is conflict and mistrust, they should ensure an end to conflicts with other peoples; they should take unilateral steps for peace, without waiting for the initiative to come from the other side.

This is exactly what the Prophet Muhammad did at Hudaybiyyah (6 AH/ 628 AD). By refusing to be provoked in the face of harassment from the Quraysh, and accepting all their demands, he put an end to a conflict which had been raging for twenty years. In doing so he defused the tension which had marked relations between Muslims and their non-Muslim compatriots. The result of his seemingly capitulationary action, as the Qur'an tells us and history verifies, was a 'clear victory' for the Muslims.

If the Muslims are to detonate the sitting bomb of communal riots, as it is their duty to do, they can

only do so by following the example of the Prophet, and refusing to be provoked, even in the face of provocation from the other side. Failure to do this can only result in further escalation in a conflict which serves only to distort Islam in the eyes of others, especially their adversaries.

Communal violence is one of the most talked of subjects these days, and discussion thereon are dominated by the fact that the brunt of police violence has to be borne by the Muslims. ‘The policemen are killers,’ say Muslims. Their theme song is that the brutalities of Adolf Hitler and Chengiz Khan pale into insignificance when compared with what the police inflict on innocent Indian citizens.

At face value, this would appear to be correct. But we must pause and give greater thought to the reasons for police ‘misconduct.’ Why should it take place at all? If we marshal facts, we see that in every case, the situation has been aggravated more by the Muslims being easily provoked than by a desire on the part of the police to be aggressive. And it is noteworthy that wherever there is a concentration

of Muslims, this oversensitiveness is very much in evidence; sooner or later, it is the Muslims themselves who have to pay dearly for it at every level.

Instances of present-day Muslims fighting amongst themselves are not uncommon, and the reason is no different; by nature they are easily insulted and then they become over-emotional. However, when it is a case of Muslim fighting Muslim, the quarrel is at least confined to civilised limits. But when the fight is between a Muslim and a Hindu, no matter how minor the provocation, it soon takes on a communal hue, and the price has to be paid by the whole community.

The worst of such a situation culminates in a confrontation with the police — or, in case of Uttar Pradesh, with the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC). No one seems to take into account the fact that if you pelt armed policemen with stones, they will retaliate with bullets. Why should they not make use of their superior weapons? While fighting with stray individuals is like playing with matches, fighting with the police is like playing with bombs.

Why should we expect that the result will be anything other than general carnage?

One glaring example of this is the incident which took place in the Idgah at Moradabad on August 13, 1980. It was a case of pigs having been found within the precincts of the Idgah, at which the Muslims became highly enraged. The police officer on duty pleaded with the Muslims to remain calm and assured them that the police would deal with the situation and that the culprits would be punished. But the Muslims were too incensed to listen to what the police had to say, and began pelting policemen with stones. The police officer himself was hit, and fell down seriously injured. Now it was the turn of the policemen to be provoked, and, of course, they did not discard their rifles in favour of stones. Ultimately it was the Muslims who suffered the most disastrous of consequences. And all because of their own ungovernable tempers.

It is clearly the Muslims who are the losers, whether at the individual or at the community level, yet they do not stop to think of the ferocity with which

reprisals will be carried out when they themselves have given in to provocation, lashing out at all and sundry. They think it is like aiming a blow at a domestic animal which, if it reacts at all, will do so mildly and without rancour. They do not stop to consider that when they lash out in a frenzy of emotionalism, it is a savage wild beast with which they have to deal — an untamed monster, which will fight back with tooth and claw. The culminating point of their endeavour will be the inevitable backlash of police brutality.

Events having shown that Muslims clash not only with Hindus, but also with the police we should now ascertain where to lay the blame. Clearly, the greatest offenders are the journalists and leaders of the Muslim community itself. After each and every riot they cannot find words enough to describe the 'brutality and savagery' of the police; in consequence, Muslim sentiments are kept perpetually on the boil. Their anger against and hatred for the police are never allowed to simmer down. As a result, whenever policemen appear on the scene, they become enraged and hit out at them, trying by all possible means to humiliate them. This

belligerent attitude on the part of Muslim newspapers and leaders is the root cause of the intense mutual hatred between Muslims and the police.

The sole solution to the problem is to be found in the Qur'an, which bids us to return good for evil: 'Good and evil deeds are not alike. Requite evil with good, and he, between whom and you there is enmity, will become your dearest friend' (41: 34).

The result of acting out of goodness is that it has a softening effect on the enemy — to the point where he becomes a friend. Even members of the PAC would not be immune to such social palliatives. They are, after all, just human beings like everyone else, and would surely be open to an amicable and reasonable approach.

* * *

PATIENCE AND PIETY

Of all the innumerable people who inhabit this world besides ourselves, there are few who are not trying to achieve some kind of success, or who are

not at least striving to outdo their fellowmen. To attain these ends, they will proceed as they please, for they have been given complete freedom of action by their Creator. There is, therefore, a never-ending scramble for the good things of life, a constant jockeying for position, and an all-too-frequent lack of scruple in elbowing contenders out of the way. We have to face the sad fact of life, that in this ongoing rough and tumble, the weakest are those who will fall by the wayside. There is no way of averting the hurts and losses of our competitive existence, for that is simply the way that God has made the world. This, it should be noted, is not a feature peculiar to parts of the world where Muslims and non-Muslims live cheek by jowl. It is characteristic of human existence all over the world, and is certainly to be found in all Muslim communities.

The world being as it is, problems cannot be solved by coming into conflict with everyone whose interests clash with our own. There is only one effective approach, and that is to adopt the policy of avoidance *(i'raah)* favoured by the Qur'an. Only by sidestepping those who try to obstruct our progress

in life can we continue on our journey with any success. But in order to pursue such a course, the virtue of patience must be sedulously cultivated. To adopt a policy of restraint and simply remove oneself from the path of someone who is bent on being obstructive does require a high degree of forebearance.

But then, the alternative — attaining one's objectives in an aggressive, confrontational way — means being anti-social and creating disharmony on a variety of fronts, all of which is inconsistent with the ideals of social order.

Believers are fortunate in having the assurances of the Qur'an that so long as they are guided by the tenets of their faith, they will not be harmed in any way by the malice or misdeeds of their opponents:

> If you are patient and guard yourselves against evil, their machinations will never harm you. God has knowledge of all their actions (3:120).

This means that believers should be more concerned with their own inner state than they are

with the external conditions in which they find themselves, and that, above all, they should adhere to the guidance they have received from God, for this will lead them along the paths of patience and piety. The nurturing of these qualities will build up a protective barrier against plotting and conspiracies. It will, indeed, provide them with an impenetrable defence.

But why is it that patience is such a rare quality in human beings? It is because it entails the suppression of one's feelings when provoked and the suffering of losses and setbacks without protest — neither of which is an easy thing to do. It is only those who can rise above the petty vengefulness engendered by such situations who will be successful in developing this virtue. The first step towards its attainment is the piety so strongly advocated by the Qur'an; it means, in effect, having an eternal fear of God in one's heart.

The truly pious person ceases to live on purely human level; he ascends to a divine level where, above all else, he cherishes the will of God, and where all of his actions are aimed at consolidating

the blessings promised to him by his Maker. Externally, he may appear to be living in this world, but, in fact, he is living on an exalted plane where his inner senses are in tune with the everlasting world of God.

* * *

On one occasion in Damascus, the first Umayyad caliph, Amir Muawiyah, distributed some sheets, one of which was given to an elderly Damascan who numbered among the Ansar. Dissatisfied with the particular sheet he had been given, he became angry and shouted, 'By God, I will hit Muawiyah on the head with this sheet!'

Muawiyah at that time was Caliph of a colossal Muslim empire, but he did not become angry at what the old man had said. Instead, he sent for him and, uncovering his own head, he said: 'Go ahead and carry out your oath but remember, one old man should take pity on another.' The Ansari, ashamed of himself, asked the Caliph's forgiveness and quietly went away.' (*Al-Dawah*, 12 Jamadi al Awwal, 1407 AH).

If, in response to the old man's outburst, Muawiyah had become infuriated and reacted vengefully, the seeds of dissension would have been sown throughout society. But Muawiyah deliberately avoided displaying any negative reaction and, answering anger with coolness, bowed to his would-be opponent, thus forestalling the development of negative tendencies in society as a whole.

Muawiyah might well have acted quite differently. His line of thinking could have been, 'If I adopt a forgiving stance, my authority over the people will be compromised and it will become difficult to keep order in governing them.' But this would have been a highly superficial assessment of the situation, for never in the entire course of history has anarchy resulted from the adoption of a forgiving attitude on the part of a ruler. It might easily be assumed that disorder would ensue, but, in fact, events take quite the contrary course.

There is no one in the world who displays greater power than one who answers stridency with calmness, ruffianly behaviour with sobriety, who,

faced with contumacy, makes a gift of gentleness and love in return.

* * *

TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSE

I recently had a talk with a *hakim*, an expert in the unani system of medicine, during which we discussed the respective merits of the unani and allopathic systems. The Hakim pointed out that the fundamental difference between the two was that whereas the allopathic system concerns itself with removing only the symptoms of a complaint, the unani system attacks the root cause. To illustrate his point, he cited the allopathic doctor who gives aspirin, or some other such painkiller, for a headache. This provides only temporary relief, for it does not remove the source of the pain. The unani physician, on the other hand, would first look into the cause of the headache — perhaps some disorder in the digestive system — then he would set about treating that, and not just the headache. He would never aim at giving just temporary relief. The Hakim was, therefore, severely critical of the allopathic method, while he described the unani

system, as both reasonable and natural, having as its objective a permanent cure.

Later, in the discussion, the subject of Indian Muslims came up. The Hakim argued that there was a need to provide instant solutions to the critical problems besetting Muslims today. ‘But,’ he said, ‘you do not have any quick solutions for these problems. All you offer is a philosophy, or a code of conduct — patience, avoidance of confrontation, unilateral withdrawal of complaints. Under the present conditions, it is not an all-embracing philosophy which they need, but solutions for individual problems.’

I said to the Hakim: ‘As far as individual maladies are concerned, the science you have learned as a healer tells you that the cause must be removed if the treatment is to be beneficial. You could call this a philosophy too. And it is one which you would certainly not give up in favour of a patchwork treatment of symptoms. When it comes to social maladies, however, you pronounce yourself in favour of the piecemeal removal of symptoms, leaving the cause untouched. If you were to apply

the same standards to social ills as you do to physical ills, you would see that it is just as essential to remove the cause in the former as it is in the latter. The symptoms of social malaise will disappear only when we have a philosophy which tackles the root cause.

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THE CORRECT APPROACH

I once chanced upon a group of Muslims at a place where a minor communal riot had taken place, and found that they were heatedly proclaiming that the Muslims had done nothing whatsoever to provoke the other community, and that the latter had begun fighting for no apparent reason. I counselled patience and asked them to tell me exactly how the fighting had started. It seems that at the spot where the clash took place there is a mosque, with a mandir located close by. When the loudspeaker on the mosque began the call to *azan*, devotees of the other community began to ring the mandir bells, as it was also their time of worship. The Muslims asked them to refrain from doing so, but they paid no heed. When the Muslims repeated their request,

they took exception to this and a riot broke out.

Then I asked them where it was written in either the *Shar'iah,* the Qur'an or the Hadith that no non-Muslim should ring the bells in his place of worship at the time of *namaz.* Certainly none of our jurists have ever held this to be a law. In fact, never in the entire period of Muslim rule did a Muslim ruler ever order that bells should not be rung in a mandir or church at the time of prayer. This being so, I asked them why they had become enraged. I did not agree that the sound of bells disturbed their prayers. Unfortunately, those concerned did not see the point of my argument and just kept repeating whatever had already been said on the subject. They were not ready to change their ways. I wished they could have been like a friend of mine, who, at a crucial moment, suddenly saw the necessity of a different approach. Customarily stern with his children, to the point of driving them away from him, he entered his home one day to find his young son clinging precariously to the top of a pole which he had managed to clamber on to from an upper balcony. He was trying to detach a kite from some wires when he looked down and saw his father

standing there. The boy's eyes went blank with fear. The father, however, sensing immediately how dangerous a rebuke would be, talked gently to his son, and persuaded him to leave the kite and climb carefully back on to the balcony. Had he stormed and shouted at him, the little boy might have lost his grip and had a terrible, even fatal fall.

What is needed now is such a change of approach on the part of Muslims, for their present confrontational ways are quite un-Islamic and they are certainly not the ways shown to us by God and His Prophets. They are the ways of the egoists and the lovers of power and prestige. They are such ways as will forever prevent the spreading of the message of Islam, for how can *da'wah* work be effectively undertaken when the prevailing atmosphere is one of hatred and suspicion?

Many riots in this country can be traced to a wrong-headed approach to matters which could easily be settled by patient discussion. When a house goes on fire, we put out the fire with water. No one in his right mind would try to put it out with petrol. But that is exactly the kind of approach adopted by the

Muslims of today. He rushes at problems, does not try to find the proper solution and adopts an approach which is bound to aggravate the situation beyond all measure.

5. MANDIR-MASJID ISSUE

THE POSITION OF THE MOSQUE IN ISLAM

Particular structures designated as mosques are now familiar landmarks in town and village landscapes. The main aim of putting up such buildings is organisational, i.e. the fixing of a definite location makes it easier for people to engage in congregational prayer. But the mere fact of the existence of mosques does not in any way mean that Islamic worship — *namaz* — must be performed only within their walls.

The literal meaning of mosque is 'a place of prostration.' In principle, the whole earth is a mosque. That being so, the *namaz* will be complete wherever it is performed. As the Prophet Muhammad said: 'Wherever you pray is mosque. The whole earth had been made a mosque and purified for me (i.e. for Islam) so you can say your prayers wherever you are.' *(AI-Jami' li-Ahkam-il Qur'an, 19/19).*

STATUS OF MOSQUES

There are about four million mosques in the world

today. They range from the very large to the very small, but leaving aside just three particular mosques, all have equal status in the *Shari'ah.* The three mosques accorded a special status in Islam are the Sacred Mosque *(al-Masjid al-Haram)* at Mecca, the Prophet's Mosque *(al-Masjid al-Nabawi)* at Medina and *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* of Jerusalem. No other mosque, regardless of its size, fame, or historic importance, can claim this special status. It is not even lawful for a Muslim to make a journey to any mosque other than those in the vicinity of his home — with the exception of the there above-mentioned mosques — for the purpose of saying his prayers. There is no assumption that any particular mosque has an advantage over the other. So that there is no reason for Muslims to leave a nearby mosque in favour of one situated further away. According to al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet himself said that 'no journey should be undertaken for the purpose of holy worship except to *al-Masjid al-Haram, al-Masjid al-Nabawi* and *al-Masjid al-Aqsa.'*

If Muslims choose to give a mosque a resounding name like *shahanshahi masjid,* they should remember the verse of the Qur'an which says: ... these are

nothing but names' (12:40), Grandiose nomenclature does not invest a mosque with any exceptional importance.

A MOSQUE FOR WHAT PURPOSE

The Qur'an says: 'Places of worship are built for God's worship; invoke in them no other god besides Him' (72:18). At another place it says of the Prophet's Mosque at Medina, 'It is more fitting that you should pray in a mosque founded on piety from the very first' (9:108). These verses explain the reality of the mosque in terms of its objectives and its sanctity. If it has been constructed only for the worship of God, then it should be used for that purpose and no other. The mosque can thus be the focal point for only such acts as bring man closer to God.

The Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) makes the same point about the purpose of mosques, i.e. that the mosque is a centre for the inculcation of *taqwa* (piety arising from awe of God). The aim determines the nature of the mosque. Its location, construction, system, activities, atmosphere — all should be based on the taqwa

principle. Anything likely to thwart the realization of this objective has to be carefully guarded against. The main criterion in all matters pertaining to the mosque must be taqwa and nothing other than taqwa.

The history of Islam tells us that the above-mentioned aspects of the mosque have always been given special importance, and anything likely to harm the cause of taqwa, even in the slightest degree, has been sedulously avoided. Here, I should like to mention certain historical events which place the mosque and its status in the correct perspective.

LOCATION OF THE MOSQUE

When the Prophet Muhammad emigrated from Mecca to Medina, he built a mosque in the city, now known as the Prophet's Mosque.

When he arrived in Medina, there was a vacant tract of land where the mosque now stands. It was owned by two orphans, Sahal and Suhayl.

It has been recorded that, when the Prophet Muhammad wanted to negotiate the price of this

piece of land, the two brothers said, 'O Prophet of God. We would be glad to give you this piece of land without accepting any money.' But the Prophet was not willing to accept the land without paying for it. So he bought it for ten dinars.

This act on the part of the Prophet illustrated a principle of Islam that the land on which a mosque stands should not even have the semblance of a personal possession, so that no one can claim any special right to it. The mosque is a place of worship and should remain so in every respect.

According to the Qur'an destroying a place of worship, belonging to any religious group, is an act of great injustice (22:4). During the period of the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the Christian lands of Syria and Palestine came under Islamic rule. The agreements signed at the time between the Muslims and Christians mentioned, among other things, that their 'churches will neither be demolished, nor used as houses, nor will any other alteration in terms of reduction be made.'

It is quite unlawful in Islam for a mosque to be built on land which has been wrongfully acquired. If a

mosque is, however, built on such land, Islamic jurists maintain that the saying of prayers in it is not legal. During the Umayyad period certain Muslims took possession of land belonging to a church and built a mosque on it.

Later, when ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-’Aziz was made caliph and had become renowned for his justice, the Christians whose land had been usurped came to him to register their complaint.

After investigating the case, the Caliph found that their complaint was well-founded and ordered that the mosque be immediately handed over to the Christians. However, highly impressed by the justice of the Caliph, the Christians donated that land to the mosque.

AVOIDANCE OF A DISPUTED SITE

It was during the caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph, that Palestine was conquered in 638 AD.

At the request of the Christians, ‘Umar then travelled to Palestine in order to finalize the agreements between them and the Muslims. It has

been historically established that during his visit the following event took place.

'Umar was sitting in the courtyard of the Church of Resurrection in Jerusalem when the time came for prayer. 'Umar then turned to the Patriarch and asked where he should say his prayers. The priest replied that he could pray right where he was seated. 'Umar, however, said, 'No, it is not proper for 'Umar to pray inside the Church, because Muslims who come here subsequently will maintain that, since their caliph has said his prayers here, a mosque should be built on that very spot. This would raise the issue of mosque and church between Muslims and Christians.' 'Umar, therefore, moved a stone's throwaway from the Church, and said his prayers.

Muslims did come to the city later on and, as he had foreseen, built their mosque at the exact point where he had said his prayers. This mosque exists to this day — a short, but discreet distance away from the church and is known as Masjid 'Umar.

Professor T.W. Arnold in his book *The Preaching of Islam,* has also mentioned this incident:

> In company with the Patriarch, 'Umar visited the holy places, and it is said while they were in the Church of the Resurrection, as it was the appointed hour of prayer, the Patriarch bade the Caliph say his prayers there, but he thoughtfully refused, saying that if he were to do so, his followers might afterwards claim it as a place of Muslim worship (p. 57).

This act of the Caliph clearly shows that building a mosque at a disputed site is not desirable in Islam. A mosque is for spiritual purification, but if it is associated with disputes and controversies, it can never be a means to attain this particular end. If it is built on a disputed site, it will become a centre of strife and discord rather than a place for God's remembrance. Such a mosque will only serve to nullify the very purpose for which it was built. The controversy, surrounding it will put an end to all opportunities for *da'wah*.

Muslims are thus commanded by God 'to endure their persecution' (14:12), so that a congenial atmosphere may be maintained between them and the non-Muslims. How it is possible then that Islam

could approve of such acts on the part of the believers as would ultimately vitiate mutual relations?

For the above reasons, it is incumbent upon the Muslims to refrain totally from building a mosque at a site which could become, today or tomorrow, a controversial issue between the two parties.

WITHOUT CLASH

Here the question arises as to what course of action should be taken by believers when they have to tackle sensitive problems concerning a mosque that has already been built. An example of how such a very delicate issue was resolved is to be found in the life of the Prophet.

The most sacred of all mosques is *al-Masjid al-Haram* (The Sacred Mosque) of Mecca. When the Prophet Muhammad received his prophethood, this mosque was in the possession of the idolaters, who had kept 360 idols inside it. This was undoubtedly the most serious of all the problems at Mecca. But the verses revealed in the Qur'an in those times do not command the Prophet to purify the mosque of

idols, or to launch protest campaigns in Mecca for their removal. Instead, for all of the thirteen years in Mecca he went on campaigning God's revelations concerning *da'wah,* the first verse of which is 'Read in the name of your Lord who created you' (Qur'an, 96:1). Throughout the whole of this Meccan period, he never once made an issue of the expulsion of the idols from the mosque. What he did do was make every effort to expel the idols from the hearts of the people. Rather than enter into the mosque to solve the problem of idols, he preferred to enter into people's hearts.

MOSQUE OF MISCHIEF

During the time of the Prophet, some people built a mosque on the outskirts of Medina and began saying their prayers in it. They wished to take the Prophet into this mosque, but he refused and it was later destroyed at his command. (Qur'an 9:107). The reason was that this mosque had been built by mischievous people who were Muslims in name only. They did not approve of the Prophet's leadership in their hearts, and had built this mosque in order to plot secretly against him in the garb of worshippers.

A mosque is not meant for such negative activities. It is for acts of *taqwa* and God's remembrance. That is why this mosque was destroyed by fire. *(Al-Tafsir al-Mazhari, 297/4).*

This incident from the Prophet's life clearly shows that, as a matter of principle, a mosque should never be used for political purposes. It is totally wrong. Making a mosque the centre for political activities levelled against the prevailing political system is a negation of the very purpose for which the mosque is built.

A mosque is purely and simply a place of worship and should be preserved as such. Only such activities as are related to worship are, permissible. Any activity detrimental to the main function of the mosque is inadmissible.

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MUSLIMS AND THE MOSQUE

The *Shariah* commands Muslims to rever and safeguard their mosques as holy places of worship. But, in the case of the Babari Masjid, if this

commandment is to be correctly interpreted and applied, we must bear in mind the sharp change in emphasis which has taken place since December 6, 1992. Prior to this date, the burning question was 'How to save the Babari Masjid?' Whereas now, the even more vexed question is 'How to prevent any further Ayodhya-like incidents?' Or more pressingly, 'How to save the Muslims?'

When placing the Babari Masjid, its demolition and steps towards redressal in the context of the *Shariah's* commands, it must be remembered that the *Shariah* distinguishes between the relative importance, on the one hand, of the mosque per se and the requisite Muslim attitude towards it and, on the other, the Muslims themselves as human beings with the right to go on living. It regards (a) the status of the mosque and (b) the Muslims' duty to maintain it as being clearly distinct and separate issues — neither equatable nor interchangeable.

It is true that the *Shariah's* commandments on mosques are clear and laid down for all time. But in their application to Muslim's obligations in respect of mosques, they cannot be regarded as

permanently binding; for humanitarian reasons, leniency may be shown, if the prevailing circumstances are so adverse as to warrant it. Then it is expected that *the Shariah* will be followed more in the spirit than in the letter, where human lives are at stake, Islamic priorities are always clear.

The better to appreciate Islamic emphasis a human as well as spiritual priorities, let us take an example from Islam's earliest period, just after the Prophet had received his prophethood. At that time the Ka'bah housed no fewer than 360 idols. It might have been expected that revelations would be made urging the Prophet to remove these idols in order to purify the Ka'bah. But this did not happen. All that was enjoined in revelations was to 'cleanse your garment, that is, improve your character.' And verses of this nature continued to be revealed throughout the entire Meccan period. So that divine concern was not with the material business of removing idols but with moral issues such as Muslim responsibilities vis-à-vis the situation prevailing in Mecca.

Keeping this distinction in view, let us now consider the question of the Babari Masjid. So far as the location of the mosque is concerned, it is accepted that, according to the *Shariah,* wherever a mosque has been lawfully built, that will be the mosque's permanent site. Even the Muslims have no right to re-locate it. And if something happens to alter that state of affairs — as at Ayodhya — the remedy for the resulting situation is specifically the responsibility of the Muslims. In the discharging of this responsibility, two options are open to them. They may either follow in the footsteps of 'Abd al-Muttalib, the Prophet's grandfather, who, finding himself in just such a situation, took no action, because he held that a mosque being a holy place, God would Himself defend it as He pleases; or they may rise in its defence. If Muslims follow the latter path, they will sooner or later find such constraints placed upon their actions as will force them to withdraw. There will be a certain limit beyond which they will not be able to proceed. With great foresight the Qur'an says: 'God does not charge a soul with more than it can bear' (2:286). That is, a believer, or believer-groups would be held responsible only for what it is possible to do.

Granted that the *Shariah* holds the original site of a mosque to be its place for all time, it still does not demand the ultimate sacrifice from Muslims for its safeguarding. The obligations of Muslims in this regard cannot be defined simply in terms of the position — material or spiritual— of the mosque in Islam. Even so, Muslims have carried out what they understood to be their duty at the cost of great sacrifice and, tragically, have been unsuccessful.

They should now accept the fact that the events of December 6 have set the final limits to their area of responsibility. Having done whatever it was possible to do, they are now totally justified, from the standpoint of the *Shariah,* in remaining aloof from the aftermath, and in bowing to the pressures of future circumstances.

It is still not perhaps completely obvious to certain sections of the Muslim public, or even to its leadership, that the very nature of the problem has undergone quite basic changes. Now it is not so much a question of safeguarding the mosque, but of protecting Indian Muslims themselves.

If the Muslims insist on continuing their agitational campaign, as of pre-December 6, they will find themselves in the grip of riots all over the country. Far from reconstructing the Babari Masjid, they will be fighting for their lives. Then, even if they survive, they will find themselves confronted with so many adverse factors, that leading an honourable life in this country will become an impossibility.

The truth is that after December 6, it has been made abundantly clear that the choice for Muslims is not between building or not building the Babari Masjid, but between building the Babari Masjid and self-destruction. Continuance of such a campaign will achieve nothing for Muslims — certainly not the re-building of the Babari Masjid — but indescribable adversity, if not ultimate ruination.

Those who would gladly offer themselves up as sacrificial martyrs in a noble cause would do well to bear in mind that deliberate self-destruction is not only *not* applauded by Islam but is deemed unlawful. There is a commandment in Islam which is known as *idtirar* (the law of necessity) which may

be invoked to permit a man do something which would normally be regarded as irregular, or even unlawful. Take the eating of pork. Devout Muslims will hold up their heads in horror at the mere thought of such an unlawful practice. Yet the 'law of necessity' may be invoked to permit a man to eat pork, if otherwise he would starve to death. (A man in this position would be called *mudtarr,* one who is forced or compelled).

The Muslim community in India is of the order of 12 crores. Is it conceivable that when the very existence of so considerable a community is at stake, the *Shariah,* which clearly makes concessions to save individual lives, will be demonstrated by Muslims themselves to be rigid and unrelenting? Will they themselves be so perverse in their interpretation of such guidelines as were meant to produce harmony and stability in society?

When self-destruction is deemed unlawful, the *Shariah's* own dictates; incumbent upon Muslims to remain aloof from the Babari Masjid issue in order to save themselves from further humiliation and loss. Given the circumstances, no further

responsibility for the fate of the Babari Masjid devolves upon them. They should always remember the tradition recorded in the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari, according to which the Prophet's wife, 'Aishah, maintained that 'whenever the Prophet had to make a choice between two courses of action, he would always choose the easier one.'

Muslims today are faced with one easy and one difficult option: to leave the Babari Masjid issue to the conscience of the country, or to continue with their agitation. The situation being as it is, it would be exactly in accordance with the Prophet's Sunnah if they were to take the former course.

In adopting this path, they would not be doing anything new. They would be doing exactly as they had done for the last fifty years in this country. As we all know, in 1947, hundreds and thousands of mosques were variously desecrated and demolished in Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan. If Muslims never launched any agitation at that time in the name of these mosques, it was only because they felt that in this matter they were in the position of the mudtarr. If they were simply to add the

Babari Masjid to the list of mosques already demolished, and sedulously refrain from any comment or action, they would only be doing what they had previously done in similar sets of circumstances.

There is nothing essentially new in my three-point formula i.e. that Muslims should give up their plea for the Babari Masjid to be rebuilt, that they should be given guarantees that no such demolition will take place in future, and that such pledges should be made part of the Constitution of India?

It simply spells out an honourable way of applying the same principle to the Ayodhya mosque as has been done in the case of thousands of other mosques in the country by the general consensus of the *'ulama*. Acceptance of this formula would ensure that Muslims suffered no further loss of life or property, that Hindus would be bound not to repeat similar acts of demolition, and that Muslims would have constitutional protection for their places of worship.

As I have stated earlier, this formula is designed not so much to uphold the *Shariah's* position on the

mosque, as to enable Muslims to re-define their responsibilities towards the mosque in the light of the Shariah's broader sense of purpose. If this formula could be adopted and implemented, not only the Muslims but the entire country would benefit from it. Hatred and violence would come to an end and peace would finally be restored. Muslims, as well as all other groups, would have the opportunity to construct their lives peacefully, and would be able to tread the path of progress and success without any obstacles to bar their way.

* * *

AYODHYA'S SOLE SOLUTION

The issue of Ayodhya's Babari Masjid has turned into one of life and death for the entire Muslim community. Repercussions in various parts of the country have by now claimed more Muslim lives than the number of stones used in the masjid's construction. This chain of death, destruction and humiliation, sparked off by the December 6 happening, continues unabated.

But let us first place this issue in its historical

perspective. This mosque was built in Ayodhya by Babar's governor, Mir Baqi, in 1528. Later, it aroused a certain amount of controversy, but, at the outset, this was no more than a minor local problem. Then, shortly after independence, (on December 22, 1949, to be precise) certain local Hindus placed three idols inside the mosque. At that time, the problem created thereby did not assume dangerous proportions, because the door of the mosque was locked soon thereafter by order of the court. Subsequently, in February 1986, however, the mosque door was opened by the administration, and the local Hindus were allowed inside for darshan and puja of the idols. It was from this point onwards that things took a turn for the worse.

Now certain Muslim leaders started a vigorous movement in the name of the Babari Masjid, while certain Hindu leaders started an agitation on their side over the issue of the Ram Mandir, but on a much larger scale. Both movements continued until, ultimately, on December 6, 1992, Hindu extremists contrived to demolish the Babari Masjid, replacing it with a makeshift mandir.

This tragic event gave a serious jolt to the conscience of the country, causing aware, serious-minded citizens everywhere to issue condemnations in the strongest of terms. The manner in which the Babari Masjid was demolished flouted the constitution, the law, the court verdict and religious and moral traditions. What was equally deplorable was that it made a mockery of the promises made by the leaders of the Ram Mandir movements. Given all these factors, the destruction of the mosque was not simply the demolition of a structure; it was akin rather to the utter negation of an entire history. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, might well call the December 6, happening a 'national tragedy.' J.S. Yadav went even further, saying that 'the very survival of our nation is at stake.'

In 1921, when Mahatma Gandhi launched a civil disobedience movement against the British, he announced that it would be run entirely on the principle of non-violence, so that at no stage and under no circumstances would brute force be resorted to. But on February 5 of that year, certain

Congressmen set fire to a police station at Churachuri, in which several constables were burnt to death. The moment Mahatma Gandhi learned of this tragedy, he pronounced it a Himalayan blunder, and announced the cessation of the movement forthwith. Yet, in the case of the much more serious violence which took place on December 6, 1922, the leaders of the mandir-masjid movement made no comparable announcement about the stoppage of their activities. On the contrary, their extremist elements are still repeating, *Ayodhya to jhanki hai, Mathura, Kashi baqi hai.*

This attitude is undeniably against the teachings of the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi and, if not immediately rectified, will plunge the country into total destruction. The least compensation for the misdeeds at Ayodhya would be for their perpetrators and sympathisers to refrain absolutely from repeating such slogans, and to make a solemn pledge that a similar step will never be taken at any time in the future.

MATHURA MOSQUE

There is a large mosque at Mathura which was built

by Aurangzeb in 1669. More than three centuries later, there is now a whole spate of propaganda about this mosque having been built at the very birthplace of Shri Krishna. It is now considered necessary to demolish the mosque and replace it with a Shri Krishna Mandir.

In order to find out the truth of the matter, I went to Mathura on January 16, 1993, where I talked to a number of knowledgeable people, both Hindus and Muslims, who belonged to Mathura. When I went to the site, along with several of my Hindu friends, I found standing adjacent to each other, a beautiful mosque and a grand mandir complex, the latter being the birthplace of Shri Krishna. In view of the Ayodhya experience, I had imagined the birthplace of Shri Krishna to be on some controversial piece of land inside the mosque — hence the demand for the site. But here, the locations being separate, there was no such clash of interests.

On a tour of various parts of the mandir, we reached a special room with a picture of Shri Krishna on a raised decorated platform, with many other related objects placed around it.

We were told that this was the very spot where Shri Krishna had been born. This particular place was right inside the mandir complex. On seeing this, one of my Hindu colleagues said, 'Mathura should not be placed in the same category as Ayodhya, because the birthplace of Shri Krishna is inside the mandir and not the masjids'

Anyone can go to Mathura and see for himself. When the birthplace of Shri Krishna is, in fact, inside the mandir complex, why should a masjid which is situated on a separate piece of land be included in their demands? If the justification for the movement against the Ayodhya structure was that it was built at the site of Shri Ram's birthplace, what possible justification could there be for demanding the demolition of the Mathura mosque, which is so obviously *not* on the site of Shri Krishna's birthplace?

A fact that needs to be even more widely publicised is that the local Hindus and Muslims long ago reached an agreement over the Mathura issue. In 1954, this issue had become controversial and had been taken to court. But through the good offices of

a Hindu saint of Mathura, Deodhar Shastri and certain other concerned individuals, a written agreement was reached between the two parties, according to which the Muslims handed over to the Hindus a large part of the waqf land surrounding the mosque. It is on this land that there now stands this large mandir complex dedicated to Shri Krishna. In view of this long established situation, how is it proper now to re-open an issue which had already been settled long since to the satisfaction of all parties concerned?

THE VARANASI MOSQUE

Let us now consider the question of Varanasi (Kashi). The leaders of the mandir-masjid movement made a point of saying that the mosque there, known as the Gyanvapi mosque, was built by Aurangzeb after demolishing the mandir which was already standing on that site. They say they are now justified in demolishing the mosque so as to build a mandir on its site. They call this plan 'correction of history.'

Leaving aside the rights or wrongs of this claim, the theory of the 'connection of history' has been

universally rejected today. Putting such a theory into practice would mean reverting to the age of religious persecution, darkness and barbarism, only in a new garb. In reality, this theory smacks of blatant fanaticism rather than of any urge to 'correct' history.

Dr. Vimal Kirti, a Bodh intellectual of Nagpur, has most pertinently asked if those Hindus who today talk of the correction of history will want to push the basis for their theory even further back in time, i.e. to the period when they themselves mistreated the Bodhs in exactly the same way that they accuse Aurangzeb of having mistreated them. Considering too that the wrongs they inflicted on the Bodh were on a much larger scale, would they now be ready to suffer Bodh vengeance in the way that they are at present avenging themselves on the Muslims?

In past centuries, when religious persecution was the order of the day, places of worship were routinely demolished. Now that age has been ended forever, such acts are seen as misdeeds. Today, any move to carry out similar demolitions is a kind of anachronism. The upholders of this movement must surely realise

that the age factor stands in their way; those who struggle towards such destructive ends must be prepared for being rejected by the age as reactionaries and for being thrust ultimately into the background by the more immediate priorities of modernity.

The way to save themselves from this fate is not to send delegations abroad to improve their image in the hopes of being absolved of any blame, but rather to refrain from such acts as are against the established norms of our times, and certainly to desist from any such activity as will make them look small in the eyes of the world.

In days gone by such acts of destruction took place everywhere. Many different groups were culpable. As such, if the principle of the 'correction of history' is to be adopted, it will be applicable not just to one group, but to all groups. The result then will be not the correction of history but the destruction of history. It will amount to losing the present in the attempt to reconstruct the past.

To be precise, the option for the upholders of this movement is not between masjid and correction of history, but between masjid and total destruction.

It has thus become universally acknowledged in modern times that in such controversial matters, closed chapters of history should not be re-opened. A more positive approach would be to keep one's eyes on the present and future, so that the task of natural reconstruction may proceed unhindered.

HINDU-HINDU PROBLEM

In this connection, the Kashi Vayapar Mandal' s decision is worthy of mention. It is based on the contention that repetition of the Ayodhya experience in Varanasi will not only have serious consequences in terms of the Hindu-Muslim problem, but that there will be a flare-up of a Hindu-Hindu problem. That is why the Hindu business community itself has turned against the possibility of any further punitive action against Muslims.

An article by Vivek Bharati, published in *The Times of India* (January 6, 1993), is in the nature of a warning to the upholders of this movement. The gist of this article is that the Hindus have learned that the movement launched in the name of Ayodhya given the reaction to it in Varanasi, was of

a destructive nature. In this city there is a strong business community numbering 500,000. Their organization, the Kashi Vayapar Mandal, had generously supported the BJP in the monetary terms. They even collected donations for the *kar sevaks* who ran amok at Ayodhya.

However, when they learned, after December 6, 1992, that the 'conquerers' of the Babari Masjid were now to launch their campaign against the Gyan Wapi mosque, the Kashi Vayapar MandaI opposed this move. It issued a strong worded appeal to the 500,000 businessmen of Varanasi to remain detached from Mandir-Masjid politics. This appeal was followed up by peace marches also organized by the Kashi Vayapar Mandal.

The reason for this action was fear of business losses. It was felt in Varanasi that to keep business flourishing, it was essential to prevent an Ayodhya-like movement finding its way also to Varanasi. If this were to happen, the business community would be the hardest hit by the consequent rioting and lawlessness. Business would, in effect, come to a halt, because the inflow of tourists who throng the

city would cease. The most affected would be the sari and carpet businesses which, at the moment, are flourishing in Varanasi.

This response from the people of Varanasi needs to be made more generally known. The time has now come to make people throughout the country understand that the launching of such movements only makes a great issue out of something which, in fact, should be treated as a non-issue. I would go further and say that it is such action that has caused India to be so halting in its pursuit of progress over the last forty years. It is as a result of such shortsightedness that India has lost its position in the world. Many countries, far poorer than ours, such as China, Korea, Singapore, etc., have left us far behind. Now the need of the hour is not to make a big issue of religious matters, but to concentrate on developing a sound economic policy for the construction of the country.

THE GRAVITY OF THE PROBLEM

In terms of consequences, the gravity of the problem is so great that profound concern is being expressed not only in India, but all over the world.

Here, I should like to cite just one example from *Asia Week,* a journal published by the *Time* group. In its editorial of January 20, 1993, entitled 'A Dangerous Pass,' *Asia Week* says of the situation, 'Asia may have to pay a heavy price for Ayodhya,' and categorizes the present movement as 'Hindu fascism.' It says, moreover, that if this movement is taken to its logical extreme, India shall have to pay a terrible price, which is unconscionable in a country where 500 million people are far below the poverty line, and 70 percent are still illiterate.

In such a situation it is vital that the mandir-masjid controversy should be ended forthwith. In this lies the good not only of both Hindus and Muslims, but also of the entire country, because only then will the country be able to make any true progress.

DETERRENT EFFECTS

The blood in the human body circulates under great pressure. That is why whenever a part of the body is injured, the blood starts pouring out. This is a dangerous state of affairs. But, thanks to a natural mechanism in the body, the moment the blood starts flowing after an injury, various deterrent

forces come into play inside the body to stop the overflow such as the contraction of blood vessels, blood clotting, etc. This natural system is called hemostasis. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica,* IV, 1015).

This is a universal law which prevails in all states of affairs. As such, whenever any negative activity assumes alarming proportions, forces are produced at that very moment which act as deterrents to the destructive process. This is why such an act or movement in any human society will last for a while and then it will of itself lose momentum.

Here I would add that this natural process has come full circle in the matter of Ayodhya. Whether or not the extremist leaders wish it, the truth is that these deterrent forces have already appeared so that the possibility of such a tragedy ever taking place again has been quite finally ruled out. In view of this situation, if the extremist leaders were to announce the cessation of their movement, this would work in their favour. They would receive the credit, albeit unmerited, for a positive and forward-looking act.

I agree with the view expressed by J.N. Nanporia, (former editor of the *Statesman)* which was

published by the daily *Pioneer* on January 20, 1993. He writes that the BJP expresses its political aims by the word Hindutva, and has entirely depended upon inciting communal feeling in order to attain its goals. But communal feelings have a limit. And recent events tell us that the BJP has reached that limit now. Hindutva as interpreted by the hardliners, crossed its danger limit on December 6 and is, therefore, no longer exploitable.

I share the desire of all serious-minded people for this matter to be settled once and for all. I have been personally involved with this problem since 1986, and am only now seeing a solution emerge after much consideration and many exchanges with both parties. This solution consists of a three-point formula — to my way of thinking the only possible strategy if this problem is to be solved. I feel certain, however, that it will be acceptable to all of the concerned patties.

THREE-POINT FORMULA

There are three parties to the Ayodhya or Mandir-Masjid controversy — Hindus, Muslims and the government. This problem could be solved if all

three parties accepted the responsibility of abiding by the following guidelines.

1. The movement launched by Hindus in the name of Masjid-Mandir should be stopped at Ayodhya. It should in no circumstances go beyond Ayodhya. Assurances to this effect could take form of a written declaration by the Hindus signed by all the four Shankaracharyas and by responsible people belonging to those Hindu movements involved in the mandir-masjid movement. This should expressly state that after Ayodhya's Babari mosque no mosque's right of continued existence will ever again be challenged by the Hindus; that all mosques in India, whatever their historical origins, will always be recognised and maintained as holy places of worship; that Hindus will never seek justification of demanding any change in future.

2. Muslims should preserve a strict silence on the issue of Ayodhya. If the protection of the Babari Masjid was their responsibility, they have now discharged it by the sacrifices they have made. Now they have reached a point where there is very little else that they can do. As such Muslims should

consciously resolve to distance themselves entirely from this issue. Till now they have been forced to take up this cause, but henceforth they should leave it to the conscience of the nation.

3. The government of India took a step in the right direction by passing the Places of Worship Act of 1991, maintaining the status quo as on August 15, 1947, in order to guarantee the security of all places of worship, (barring the Babari Masjid). Now the government should take the even more important step of making this act a part of the constitution of India. Once this step has been taken, the security of all other places of worship will have a lasting guarantee.

This three-point formula makes concessions to all the parties and looked at with seriousness, it can be acceptable to all. With the adoption of this formula, the present situation will not only be marked by normalization, but the resultant atmosphere of peace and stability will ensure the unhampered progress of the country.

The change of circumstances after December 6, 1992, at national and international levels is extremely perturbing. It calls for a final decision to be made

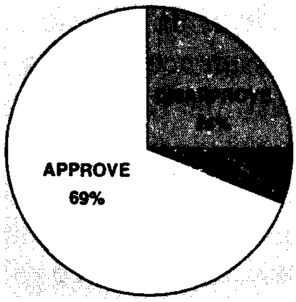
that at no place will the Ayodhya experience be repeated. In the present circumstances, the demolition of the mosque in order to replace it with mandir is no simple matter. The December 6 event has proved this to be so. It became a possibility only when constitution, law and moral traditions were all demolished along with it. The demolition of a single structure has meant the demolition of the structure of the whole country.

The truth is that for the extremist leaders of the masjid-mandir movement the choice lies not between masjid and mandir, but between masjid and destruction. J.K. Galbraith, the former American ambassador to India once called India a 'functioning anarchy.' If the present kind of masjid-mandir movement continues, future commentators will be compelled to call it 'all out naked anarchy'.

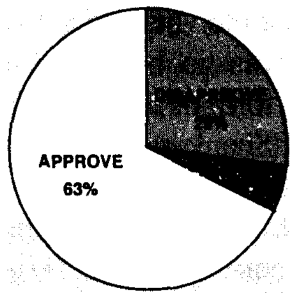
The present generation of India has to decide what kind of India it is going to bequeath to the coming generation — an advanced, prosperous India, or a poor, ruined India, unfit to be inhabited, by Hindus, Muslims or any other person.

* * *

WIDE SUPPORT FOR 3-POINTFORMULA



HINDUS = 100%



MUSLIMS = 100%

The Majority of both Hindus and Muslims in Bombay approve of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan's three-point plan to resolve the Ayodhya problem and reduce communal tension in the country, according to an opinion poll conducted by MARG. The poll, commissioned specially by SUNDAY MID-DAY, involved 805 personal interviews with men and women of all social strata living throughout the length and breadth of the city. The interviews were carried out between February 3 and 5. In view of the recent communal violence in Bombay, MARG used Muslim interviewers to seek the opinions of Muslim citizens and Hindu interviewers to obtain the reactions of the majority community.

In each interview, the three-point plan was explained to the person being interviewed and then his or her reaction sought.

The MARG poll suggests that the Maulana's plan would find favour with Bombayites of all communities. Of the 517 Hindu men and women interviewed 69 per cent said they would approve of such a plan, while 25 per cent expressed themselves against it. Among the 170 Muslim men and women interviewed, 63 per cent were in favour of the Maulana's proposal while 29 per cent were against it. Those who did not indicate their clear approval of the Maulana's plan were asked by MARG whether or not the plan could serve at least as a useful starting point for discussion. About a third of such respondents felt that the plan could fulfill that purpose. Thus in total only about one in five of the people interviewed rejected the Maulana's plan outright.

(*Sunday Mid-day* (Bombay), February 7, 1993)

CO-EXISTENCE OF RELIGIONS IN INDIA

In India, there has always been co-existence of religions in an ideal form. With a few minor exceptions, a number of religions, notwithstanding their different sets of beliefs, have always flourished here together in complete harmony. It is no exaggeration to say that the example set by India in this sphere is quite outstanding.

The most ancient religion of India, dating back to pre-historic times, is Hinduism. Then, in the fifth century BC, a new religion, Buddhism, was founded by Gautam Buddha. During roughly the same period a religion known as Jainism was founded by Mahavira. Both of the latter religions were originally separate from Hinduism, there having been some initial rift. But, ultimately, Buddha came to be recognized as an incarnation, or *avtar* of Vishnu. Similarly, Jainism became a sect of Hinduism.

About fifteen hundred years ago, Christians came to India where they propagated Christianity among the Indian people. Later, Muslims ventured on to Indian soil and, with their advent, Islam began to spread here. But, leaving aside certain exceptional

incidents, no clash or confrontation took place between Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

The underlying reason for this is quite specific. It is the remarkable flexibility of their beliefs and teachings. This, indeed, is the basis for the spirit of accommodation which has made possible the continuing co-existence of the various religious groups in this country.

So far as Hinduism, the religion of the majority, is concerned, it serves as the ultimate example of religious flexibility, with its unique concept of the manyness of reality. Its credo amounts to saying, 'I am right and you are also right.' It is thanks to this particular belief that Hindus have such deep respect in their hearts for other religions. For them, all religions are manifestations of the same Truth.

Although neither Christianity nor Islam entertain this plural concept of Truth, they both subscribe to another tenet which is also conducive to harmony, namely, respect for other religions. Christianity and Islam both stress the need to respect other religious groups and to show proper regard for them, irrespective of the circumstances.

Just as religious co-existence is valued in Hinduism, so also is it valued in Christianity and Islam. If any differences arise, they do so as a matter of rationale, and not of actual practice. That is, the goal of co-existence is achieved in Hinduism through co-recognition, while in Christianity and Islam, it is achieved through mutual esteem.

In this way, even with conflicting sets of beliefs (that is, the manyness of reality and the oneness of reality) the desired goal of co-existence is a fully established fact. The basis of this coexistence in Hinduism is the belief in a common, underlying Truth, while in Christianity and Islam, this goal is achieved through tolerance. That is to say that in one case this co-existence is found at a conceptual level, while, in the other, it is at a practical level. Whatever its intellectual sources may be, the end result — coexistence — is the same.

There are many examples of this kind of practical agreement within the fold of Hinduism itself. For instance, a vegetarian Hindu and a non-vegetarian Hindu adhere to different principles, but for practical reasons, they live happily together without

ever coming into conflict with one another.

In recent years, India has seen various clashes and, confrontations in the name of religion, and the country's image has apparently been affected by these incidents. But this has been due less to the actual points at issue than to the media's sensational coverage of them.

For instance, in 1985, a case was filed in the Calcutta High Court by a Hindu, asking that a ban be imposed on the Qur'an. This incident was given undue emphasis in media coverage, but its outcome only served as a further proof that religious co-existence is to be found in India in its ideal form, for not only was his case dismissed by the court, but his action was condemned by all national institutions and by the whole of the Hindu community.

Another instance of the refusal of the Hindu community to condone a show of disrespect for Islam was in the now infamous case of the Babari Masjid being razed to the ground. There had been discord over this mosque for a long period of time until, finally, on December 6, 1992, a group of Hindus took it upon themselves to demolish it.

It is important to understand that this tragedy took place because of certain misguided policies of political leaders and not because of religious intolerance. That is why no notable Hindu or non-Hindu ever came forward to justify the demolition of the Babri Masjid. And that is also why — with the exception of the Babri Masjid — over 350,000 mosques in India are still intact. They are all safe and secure, and are functioning as centres of religious worship and practice. Another point worth noting is that Justice P.K. Bahri has ruled in his 340-page verdict that the demolition of the disputed structure at Ayodhya was not pre--planned. (*The Times of India,* June 9, 1993).

Here I should like to emphasize that one religion versus another religion is quite a different matter from one community versus another community. So far as religion in itself is concerned, it is a fact that religious co-existence has always been found in its ideal form throughout the history of India.

It is interesting to note that prior to 1947 in undivided India, it was non-Muslims who were the biggest publishers and distributors of Islamic

literature. It is even more interesting that in divided India, it is still the non-Muslims who are to the fore in this field.

There are, of course, examples of religious intolerance, but these have always been the result of discord between two communities rather than between two religions. It has sometimes happened that members of one religious community have entered into dispute with members of another community over matters relating to their own individual or group interest (as opposed to religious interests) and then used arguments garbed in religious terminology to support their standpoint. Similarly, members of a certain community have been known to raise an issue publicly to serve their own political or material ends, again in the process using religion to further their own, individual, selfish interests. This is not religion. It is the exploitation of religion.

This kind of exploitation is always against the spirit of religion. That is why it cannot be continued indefinitely. It remains limited in its sphere and duration.

In modern India, slogans are shouted advocating the establishment of the Hindu Rashtra. In a plural society, such slogans are obviously against the spirit of co-existence, and, as such, are considered a danger by certain sections of the public. But I personally do not attach any importance either to them or to the present movement launched in the name of establishing the Hindu Rashtra. Those who fear for their future should take heart from the historic outcome of Mahatma Gandhi's pre-1947 independence movement, launched in the name of Ram Rajya, for, after independence, the system introduced was not that of Ram Rajya, but of secular Rajya.

With 75 per cent of the Indian population being either illiterate, or semi-literate, political leaders regularly make use of religious slogans to secure the public vote. But the roots of coexistence and mutual tolerance are so strong, and go so deep, that I am fully convinced that politics of this kind will never exert any profound or lasting effect on Indian society. Such slogans, which are, in essence, more political than religious, will never succeed in disturbing the religious harmony of India.

*   *   *

HINDU-MUSLIM DIALOGUE

In his book, *The Destiny of Indian Muslims,* Dr Syed Abid Husain (1896-1978) attributes the continuance of Indian Muslims' problems to their tendency to look backwards even in the face of the very basic changes wrought by the post-1947 revolution, the most important of which was the introduction of the democratic system. Despite the many positive aspects of independence, he maintains, Muslims still think in terms of the old, dictatorial rule.

Prior to 1947, during British rule, Muslims had to contend with a government which was not responsible to public opinion, and which could not be changed or removed by constitutional means, its status was that of a supreme arbiter. But today, India is a democracy; the government, elected by the people, is obliged to function according to the will of the people. Regardless of the contingency, Muslims have to deal, not with the government, but with the public, if their affairs are to be settled. 'But Muslims still labour under the impression that the solution to their problems is in the hands of the government. To the government alone they take

their troubles and from it alone they expect a remedy' (p.295).

This analysis of Muslim situation in terms of outmoded thinking is perfectly correct. What worse example of it could there be than the movement recently launched in the name of the Babari Masjid? The post-1986 campaigning for its protection and subsequently for its re-construction was instigated by Muslim leaders who were so incompetent and so deluded as to imagine that they could set themselves on a collision course with the Hindu public, and that the government still the 'supreme arbiter' to the Muslims — would give a verdict totally in their favour.

What actually happened on December 6, 1992, publicly made it quite clear what a misconception this had been — and still is. It totally belied what the Prime Minister had publicly declared on August 15, 1992, i.e. that he would never allow the demolition of Babari Masjid. Despite his having despatched ten police force companies to the border of Ayodhya and having made a number of other official arrangements, what happened in reality was

not what the Prime Minister had in all good faith declared, but simply the razing to the ground of the Babari Masjid. This was done by *kar sevaks* who forced their way into the town. Having demolished the mosque, they removed all stones and debris and replaced them with a makeshift mandir. They also managed to obtain the court's permission to place idols of Ram Lalla inside it, along with the right to visit it for *darshan* and *puja*.

This event is a clear proof of the public being superior in strength to the government in present-day India. It is a final demonstration of the public standing high above individuals who are voted to power for a limited period of time, even when the said individuals are accorded ministerial rank. One would have to be either very naive or bereft of all common sense to go on believing that this same central government which failed to prevent the demolition of the Babari Masjid, has the power to demolish the newly constructed mandir, either peaceably or by force, or to remove the idols placed therein for the purpose of re-building the Babari Masjid on its former site.

Yet, as reported in the press, a delegation of about twenty 'prominent persons' of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board came to Delhi in April 1993, where they prepared a memorandum by consensus, asking the government to remove the makeshift mandir and the idols from the site of the Babari Masjid, and to re-build the Babari Masjid in exactly the same location. This they submitted to the Prime Minister at a meeting they had with him on April 5th. Obviously, the demolition of the Babari Masjid in broad daylight, had done nothing to jolt our so-called Muslim leaders into a proper state of awareness.

To make such a political foray as representatives of the Muslim community is nothing sort of anachronism. The most poignant lesson the Muslims should have learnt from the December 6 happening was that from that point in time onwards they had best concentrate their energies on winning over the Hindu public. All their efforts should have been channelled into influencing the *Hindu janata* (masses) rather than into making representations to the 'rulers' of New Delhi. The fact that our leaders are still circumambulating New

Delhi is a clear indication of their utter incompetence. Given the present state of impasse, it is incomprehensible that a delegation from the Law Board should even have approached the Prime Minister with such a request. The only possible reason is their total inability to come to grips with present-day realities. Mentally they are still living in the India of fifty years ago. They still do not grasp the fact that, today, India is governed, not by a sovereign, with all powers rested in his own person, but by the people.

It is high time that Muslims changed their way of thinking. They must look to the Hindu public and not to the government or the administration. Muslim leaders must meet Hindu leaders. Muslims must improve their relations with the Hindu majority. In fact, Hindus and Muslims must interact at all levels if ever tensions are to be eased between them and misunderstandings removed. Only in that way will improved relations and peaceful co-existence, become distinct realities.

The solution to our problems lies not in Muslim-ruler meetings, but in Hindu-Muslim meetings. The

need of the hour is for a Hindu-Muslim dialogue at an all-India level with the participation of serious and influential people from both communities. Its aim should be the promotion of peace in a purely non-political way.

In this dialogue people from both the communities should not only state quite openly what they want from the other community, but must strive also to put an end to this confrontational state of affairs and to discover common grounds on the basis of which both the communities could live together like good neighbours.

The holding of such a dialogue is in complete consonance with the Islamic *Shariah*. The Peace Treaty of Hudaybiyyah in the history of Islam was the result of a successful dialogue of this kind. After the Prophet of Muhammad's migration (622 AD), there was a sharp deterioration in relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Arabia, resulting in a number of armed confrontations.

Finally, in 628 AD, the Prophet Muhammad came to stay for two weeks at a place called Hudaybiyyah, near Mecca. He negotiated with the Meccan non-

Muslims there, and then, after conceding to many of their demands, he signed a peace treaty between Muslims and non-Muslims.

At present, the rock on which India's progress is foundering is the strained relations between Hindus and Muslims. If a dialogue of the above nature could be held in all seriousness, in a spirit of accommodation and with a strict sense of justice, Hindu-Muslim relations could very soon be normalized, and this in itself would immediately open up a whole new chapter in the history of modern India. Nothing would then stand in the way of our country's future advancement.

* * *

TOWARDS PEACE AND HARMONY

The demolition of the Babari Masjid on December 6, 1992, was a calamity which shocked the whole country. It appeared that our journey towards progress as a nation had foundered in some impassable quagmire.

It was at that juncture that I presented a practicable

formula for the de-fusing of the situation. There was nothing innovative about it. It was in fact, a differently worded formulation of the Place of Worship Act of 1991, which provided for the maintenance of the status quo as on August 15, 1947, for all places of worship in the country, with the exception of the Babari Masjid.

Although this exception ultimately bore the very negative fruits of December 6, 1992, the spirit of the act had still to be honoured. Part of my formula was, therefore, that in the vaster interests of the country, both the communities should now show their willingness to desist from further argument, the Muslims remaining silent about the Babari Masjid and the Hindus backing away from the issue of the other mosques as potential targets.

Both communities felt at first that there were certain obstacles to putting this formula into practice. But developments over the past one-year have proved to be entirely in favour of this kind of settlement. Now we are in a better position to consign this controversy to oblivion.

When this formula was initially brought to the

attention of the public, Muslims in general made it plain that they were willing to forget the Babari Masjid for the sake of putting an end to the controversy, but they also pointed out that it was not just a single mosque which was at issue, but innumerable mosques which were targeted for demolition. A slogan raised on December 6 while the demolition of the Babari masjid was being carried out, *'Ayodhya to jhanki hai, Mathura, Kashi baqi hai'* was produced by the Muslims as proof of the Hindus' intentions. After making a thorough analysis of the situation, the writer had come to the conclusion that the Muslims' main concern was no longer the Babari masjid, but the fate of other mosques whose future seemed uncertain to them.

Suffice it to say that the state elections in November, December, 1993, have happily put an end to Muslim apprehension. The inability of the BJP to secure an absolute majority in several states, including UP, gives a clear indication of the Hindu mood of today. The BJP was in power in UP when the Babari Masjid was demolished, and that, from the Muslim standpoint, was the factor which had made the demolition possible. Now if the Hindus' top

priority had been the mandir-masjid issue, if they had really desired the same fate for the Mathura and Kashi mosque as that of the Babari Masjid, the state elections would surely have provided them with a golden opportunity to fulfill this ambition. Extending full support to the parties concerned would certainly have paved the way for carrying out further demolitions. But the result of the election shows that the Hindu voters of the state did not attach such great importance to this issue, which is one reason for the BJP having failed to secure an absolute majority.

Another problem created in this connection was sparked off by the demand made by the self-styled All India Muslim Personal Law Board for the re-building of the Babari Masjid at the same site. The board members set about giving the impression that they were the representatives of all Indian Muslims, and that any demand they made was on their behalf. But subsequent events have proved that in no way does the Law Board represent the feelings of the entire Indian Muslim community. That is why, despite their best efforts, they have failed to re-mobilize Muslims on this issue.

It was reported in the press that at a meeting in Bombay on November 20, 1993, the Law Board appealed to all Muslims to pray in mosques all over the country on December 3, 1993, for the reconstruction of the Babari Masjid. Now the demolition of the Babari Masjid took place on December 6. (That is why 101 members of the Law Board will come to Delhi on December 6 and march towards the residence of the Prime Minister.) Why then should December 3 have been fixed for the prayer day and not December 6? The plain and simple reason is that December 3 was a Friday (a day of mass, congregational prayer). The Law Board member knew full well that Muslims, now no longer interested in the reconstruction of the Babari Masjid, would not, on this plea, gather in mosques throughout the country on December 6. So they fixed December 3, that being a date on which Muslims would in any case be gathering on their own in mosques, in order to create the appearance of there having been a demonstration. By exploiting this gathering the Law Board will seize the opportunity to say, 'Look, the Muslims of the entire country are with us on this score. That is why they held prayer meetings on that day in mosques all over the country.'

In short, the formula presented for the solution of the Babari Masjid issue in accordance with the Places of Worship Act has now come to be accepted in practice by both Hindus and Muslims, although there has been no public declaration of this, a tacit agreement having apparently been reached between both parties. The only need now is for this reality to be consciously and publicly acknowledged so that this controversy may quite finally be put to an end. Only then will the country's journey towards progress make a fresh and unhindered start.

6. MINORITIES IN INDIA AND THE NATIONAL MAINSTREAM

The question of minorities in India and their place in the national mainstream has been on our debating agenda for a long period of time. As an issue which has preoccupied all our more serious intellectuals, it has been the subject of much writing and oratory. But, despite half a century of discussion, efforts to resolve this important question have yet to culminate even in ideological agreement. We are still very far from taking concrete steps to solve the main problems.

I would go further and say that on this issue we have not even succeeded in determining the starting point of our endeavours despite the fact that the country's future rests, above all, on finding the correct answer to this question. It is, therefore, essential that this issue be taken up anew, but with greater seriousness, and efforts should be made to formulate a practicable scheme, at least on the ideological level. If we could set ourselves even to projecting a theoretical basis for future action, we should be at least halfway to success. It is a true

saying: 'Well begun is half done. '

It is clear that differences between minorities and majorities in this country do exist to a very marked degree. It is also undeniable that repeated confrontations between two of the communities in question result in severe setbacks to the country as a whole. So long as no proper remedy is found for this worsening affliction, progress at the national level is bound to remain a very halting affair.

Now, in determining what course should be followed, we must at the outset, consider what model we should choose for the establishment of peaceful relations between the majority and minority communities. So far as I can see, there are two basic models before us which are worth studying. The first achieves harmonious 'togetherness' by the deliberate overlooking of the differences between the two communities. This is commonly referred to as the multi-culture model. The other achieves harmony by obliterating all differences, casting everyone, as it were, in the 'Bharati' mould. This, as opposed to the multi-culture model, is the uniculture model.

This second model, based on the principle of co-existence, is identical to that presented by the initial builders of post independence India. That is, various groups of the country, without sacrificing any features of their separate cultural identities, became one nation for the sake of the vaster interests of their homeland.

However, may I say, that for the multicultural model to have become the accepted pattern of national life, a price ought to have been paid by the political group which played the leading role in the country after independence. Unfortunately, the group which seized the opportunity to come to power neglected to pay this price and, in consequence, this model, despite its realism, failed to gain continuing support.

And what was the price that should have been paid? The price, to be brief, was free and fair elections. For any constructive work to be done in the country after independence in 1947, it was a must to create an atmosphere in which each political group would feel that the door to power was open to it and that, by peaceful democratic

methods, it could reach its goal. But once one political group came into power, it became consumed by the desire to keep that power in its clutches indefinitely.

Whenever a ruling group becomes a prey to such a desire, it knows full well that it cannot remain in power and, at the same time, remain within the law. It is even willing to sacrifice internal peace so that it should never be dislodged from its position of pre-eminence. The age in which we live is democratic only in name, for no one is willing to accept political deprivation. That is why our society has become a breeding ground for destructive politics.

This has been the political situation in India since the attainment of its freedom. Whenever political elements outside the ruling group have felt that they could not gain political power in a lawful and peaceable manner, they have taken over the reins of power by unconstitutional means. In a country like India, with such a high percentage of illiteracy, the easiest way to achieve this objective is through the deliberate escalation of emotionalism in politics. That is why, particularly after 1985, the Mandir--

Masjid issue flared up with such tremendous intensity. What came to pass as a result is now a matter of history.

Due to the growth of this anti-democratic variety of politics, multicultural is no longer the model for our civilization; it has been quite overshadowed by another model, which we have already referred to as uniculture. Though this latter model is still a matter of controversy among the thinking people of the country, its popularity with the public, particularly in northern India, cannot be denied.

In a democratic set-up, purely as a matter of principle, no one can be prevented from advocating the uniculture model, but I am sure that it would hardly be feasible to put it into practice, because that, in a sense, would be going against nature. It would amount to attempting to change natural law. And no human power is great enough to do that.

Diversity is an eternal law of life. Where there are ten people in a family, each member, by temperament, will be different from all the others. The same is true of nations, only on a larger scale. If the various groups making up a nation are of

different temperaments, it is due to this very law of nature. Then who can change them? No power, or even super-power can bulldoze nature.

The supporters of uniculture' are themselves undermined by historical contradictions. For instance, they have to concede that Aurangzeb, despite concerted efforts, failed during his 50 years of rule to produce a uniform culture in India. The British, who were rulers of this country for more than a hundred years, fared no better in spite of doing their utmost to bring a uniform culture to the country. This is a matter of common knowledge.

Experiments of this nature have been tried in other parts of the world too, for instance, the movement of Americanization launched in the US after the Second World War. Its goal was to colour the different cultural groups inhabiting the US in the monochrome of American culture. But all the efforts made by the State to promote uniculturalism were doomed to failure. The reality had finally to be acknowledged, and the principle of multiculturalism has now been formally adopted.

Bearing in mind this example, we have to ask what special powers are at the command of the uniculturalists of India that they are so confident of having exceptional success in their battle with nature—a field in which all have been put to flight and have accepted defeat.

Besides, this concept of uniculturalism is only a halfway house so far as the actual goal is concerned. We do not aim at uniculture for the sake of uniculture. The ultimate goal of uniculture is to produce an atmosphere of social and national harmony — something for which uniculture merely provides the groundwork.

One telling example of the inadequacy of uniculture as a model is the manner in which the Hindu-Sikh relationship has developed. For approximately four hundred and fifty years, the Sikhs had been a sect or a part of Hinduism, their culture being in every respect the same as that of the Hindus. In spite of this, tremendous differences arose between the two, culminating in armed conflicts — a situation which, although recently brought under control, may be vitiated at any moment by renewed bursts of

violence. Had uniculture been enough to produce harmony, the Hindu-Sikh problem would never have arisen in the first place.

In view of this sensitive state of affairs, the only way to bring about harmony among the various groups in the country is to act upon the moral principle, favoured in the west, of 'agreeing to disagree'. That is one of the ways in which we can uphold the principle of peaceful co-existence. Another way is to inculcate in the public mind such ideas as will enable them to practise the art of living together in harmony, irrespective of their differences. The first principle they must observe is to give due respect to others. In so doing they will be obliged to overlook points on which there may be disagreement, and place greater emphasis on points on which there can be agreement.

For a way of life to become nationally viable, there must be general acceptance of the principle of tolerance. Tolerance, we must concede, is the sole basis on which a harmonious society can be created. Compared with tolerance, all other concepts are simply beautiful words which can never turn into reality.

We all need to learn a lesson from the complete absence of friction between Hindus and Christians, and Hindus and Parsis, despite the Christians and Parsis having their own distinct and separate cultures. Each has managed to retain its own special identity and yet co-exist as parts of the national mainstream. There have been no confrontations whatsoever with the majority community. This is in stark contrast to the bloody confrontation which took place in the not too distant past between India's Sikhs and Hindus, despite the Sikhs being, historically speaking, an integral part of the cultural heritage of the majority community.

The Christians represent a mere 3 per cent of the population, while the Parsis barely number a hundred thousand. In other words, these are very small communities living in a very vast country, yet thanks to special qualities which they possess, they enjoy a fame and status out of all proportion to their numbers. This, too, in spite of their being closed societies from the religious point of view. Their case, far from being one of uniform culture, is one of cultural individuality, which does not apparently distance them from the national mainstream.

How is it that with their distinct and separate cultural identities; they have never found themselves in confrontation with the majority group? In seeking an answer to this question, we arrive at a truth which is not generally appreciated, and that is that no *group*, whatever its beliefs or way of life may be, will ever be forced into confrontations with other groups, so long as it remains in the eyes of the other groups a no-problem group itself.

Let us consider the Christian community. They have engaged themselves on a large scale in setting up academic institutions, hospitals and other welfare centres and, to the greatest possible extent, have avoided clashing with others and have kept themselves occupied within their own spheres of activity. The same is true of the Parsi community, most of whom have confined themselves to the spheres of industry and commerce. They make no demands on others, and find nothing to protest about to the other groups existing within the same natural framework.

In other words, the Christians and Parsis have both succeeded in making themselves 'no-problem' communities within the social fabric of the country. And history shows that when a group presents no problems whatsoever to society in general, it is quick to gain acceptance in its own right.

Now let us take the case of the Muslim community. At present, there is no denying that it is the Muslim minority which is facing the greatest problems. This is because, being the largest minority group in the country, they come next in numerical status to the majority group. It is a historical fact that, be it an individual or a community, there is always some rivalry between the largest group and the next in line. This situation is unlikely to change, unless the next-in-line group can learn to keep a low profile and present no problems either to the majority or to other groups.

The failure of the Muslims to accept this truth has meant continual rivalry between their community and the majority community over the last fifty years, the confrontational aspects of which have done extraordinary damage in various ways to the

country as a whole. If we attempt to analyse the reasons for this, the only cause that can be identified is the Muslim community having taken the shape of a problem community.

The deeper we go into this, the more convinced we become that the Hindu-Muslim problem by its very nature, is identical to the Hindu-Sikh problem. Hindus and Sikhs had been living in peace and amity for the last four hundred and fifty years. There was no rift between them. But when the Sikhs launched a movement for a separate state twenty years ago, and then carried it to violent extremes, it was at that point that the two communities found themselves at loggerheads. The continuance of this state of affairs is traceable quite simply to the Sikhs having become a problem community. When a problem group is not tolerated even within a family, how can it be tolerated at the national level?

Exactly the same has happened with the Muslims. Before the movement for the partition of the country, launched with great fervour in the 40s by Muslim leaders, it is an indisputable fact that Muslims lived in this country in peace and

harmony with the majority group. No notable rivalry or rift existed between the two on a communal level. But after the vigorous two-nation campaign and the resultant partition of the country in 1947 Indian Muslims turned into a problem community in the eyes of their countrymen. This is the principal reason for the Hindu-Muslim problem in India, the bitter consequences of which are unfolding today before our very eyes.

The above analysis makes it quite clear that in order to bring about harmony between different communal groups in India, the only proper approach is to make known our unreserved acceptance of the multi-culture models. It is this model, and this model alone which will be crowned with success, the reason being that it is the only one which is truly in consonance with nature. However, there is one condition which is basic to its success: the minority community must give whatever co-operation is necessary to ensure its stability. And co-operation of this nature will mean the Muslim minority becoming a 'no-problem' community as far as the whole country is concerned. If this condition could be fulfilled, there would be nothing further to

stand in the way of an atmosphere of harmony.

I think Muslims need to be reassured that if they are willing to accept the role of a 'no-problem' community, this will not constitute a deviation from their religion. On the contrary, it will amount to a closer adherence to the tenets of their own faith. Where they have actually deviated from Islam is in having allowed themselves to become a problem community. Their converting themselves into a 'no-problem' community would mean a return to their true religion. Here, I should like to refer to certain relevant instances from the history of Islam.

Abu Talib, an uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, was a staunch supporter of his in Mecca. After Abu Talib's death, the Prophet needed a new supporter to enable him to continue with his mission of communicating the word of God to the people. To this end, he visited various tribes with the request that they extend their support to him. It was necessary to do this because, in those days of tribalism, no one was safe without the support of a tribe. (Details of the Prophet's visits to various tribal chiefs have been recorded in books of *Sirah.)* At a

meeting with one such tribe, the Prophet explained to them that he needed their support if he was to continue to communicate the divine message. At the same time, he took care to make it very clear to them that he would not compel any of them to accept anything that was not to their liking.

To put it another way, it amounted to his saying that he would never create any problems for them, and that he would remain among them as an entirely 'no-problem' person.

Another instance of his deliberate avoidance of friction was in his circumspect and gradual approach to resolving the dilemma of the 360 idols still standing in the vicinity of the Ka'bah in ancient Mecca after the inception of Islam. It is significant that the first commandment the Qur'an gave to the believers was *'iqra'* (read). This shows that in the first phase of Islam, greater emphasis was placed on the acquisition of knowledge than on the purification of a mosque. On a parallel with this, the Muslims of today should make education their most burning issue, rather than keep on seeking amends for the desecration of a place of worship.

Something else that modern Muslims should remember is that although the early Meccans were idolaters, the Prophet Muhammad never addressed them as idolaters, or as *kafirs,* but as his 'countrymen.' Literally, the word, *kafir* means, 'the one who denies or covers.' In the Qur'an this word is applied strictly to the contemporaries of the prophets who disbelieved their message even when directly addressed by the prophets themselves. The Qur'an does not use the term to denote non-Muslims in general. *Kafir* is not the name of a community. People in the Qur'an were referred to as *an-nas* (people) and only those individuals were called *kafirs* who rejected the Prophet Muhammad's call despite his unflagging efforts to convey it to them over a long period of thirteen years. According to this Sunnah of the Prophet, Muslims should likewise regard the Hindus of India as their countrymen and treat them like brothers.

Friction is to be avoided at all costs. But the ideal, frictionless state can be achieved only if positive efforts are made to reduce, if not eliminate the cause of ill-feeling. One bone of contention is the right Muslims claim to say their prayers on busy streets.

Do they not know that the removing of obstacles from the path has been described by the Prophet Muhammad as a sign of *iman* (faith)? That being the case, where is the need for Muslims to protest at not being allowed to pray on busy thoroughfares? They should remember that this removing of obstacles is a part of the teaching of Islam itself.

Another bone of contention is the Muslims' denial of the Hindus' right to lead their processions past Islamic places of worship. Have Muslims forgotten that when Palestine was conquered, the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, entered into a formal, written agreement with the Christians that they would be allowed to take their processions before the mosque of Jerusalem? In view of this early precedent, why must Muslims object to Hindu processions in front of mosques, and why must they try to stop them?

Muslims also look askance at the Indian government's campaigns to promote family planning. They look upon it as a sinister plot to keep the Muslim population to a negligible level. They should just remember that in Pakistan, which

is an Islamic state, the government there is also running family planning schemes. All envelopes carry such messages as 'Small family, life of ease' and Pakistani newspapers regularly publish family planning advertisements supplied to them by the government. Why then should Muslims in India feel alarmed at such schemes, and feel the need to stage protests against them?

On the question of the re-location of mosques, Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries have not hesitated to do so when exceptional circumstances have warranted such a step. If the authorities in India decide that because of some dire necessity, or to avoid some evil, a mosque has to be re-located, why should Indian Muslims feel threatened by this? Why should they even take exception to it? Considering that in most of the Arab countries, Muslims are not permitted to make speeches or hold gatherings inside mosques, and, except at the appointed hours for prayers, are not even allowed to pray or recite the Qur'an, it seems unjustifiable for Indian Muslims to object to the ban on the use of loudspeakers in mosques at night time in predominantly Hindu areas. Where is the need for

Muslims to agitate and stage demonstrations against this rule?

Islam loves peace, not confrontation. Muslims who believe that nothing can be gained without resorting to confrontation should consider what benefits flowed from the Peace Treaty of Hudaybiyyah, and how this agreement was made possible by the Prophet's acceptance of all of his opponents' conditions. Now Muslims must follow their Prophet's example by overlooking their own problems and working towards peaceful relations with their antagonists. Peaceful co-existence is the only viable state for their community in this day and age, but it will become a reality only when they make peace and not communal prestige their supreme goal. Only in that way will they become a 'no-problem' community in India. Only by aiming at peaceful co-existence will they rid themselves of all unnecessary problems.

The only way to bring the minorities of India into the mainstream with a view to producing communal harmony at the national level, is to adopt the multi-culture model. In order to establish this

model in practice, each party has to pay a price. The ruling group has to pay the price of keeping the election process free and fair. The defeated party, for its part, must accept its defeat and give the victorious party the opportunity to run the government unhindered by attacks on its probity or efficiency. That is the only way that destructive politics may be eliminated from the national scene.

The majority community has also to pay the price of accepting the fact that the unicultural model is not practicable. The only practicable model is that which is based on multi-culture, that being both feasible and beneficial.

Minority communities — Sikhs and Muslims in particular — have to decide that they will adopt the way of co-existence in their own as well as in the vaster interests of the country. And they must make a conscious decision to remain integral parts of this country by becoming 'no-problem' communities.

If the multi-culture model is seriously accepted and each of the parties concerned is willing to pay the necessary price without further delay, an atmosphere of peace and harmony is bound to

prevail, thus allowing the country to march on its way to progress at an ever-increasing pace. Once a country is launched on the right course nothing can come in the way of its reaching its desired destination.

In conclusion, I pray to God to grant His mercy to all of us, and to grant true wisdom and understanding to the people of this country so that they may march unitedly towards a peaceful, happy, prosperous future.

7. ISLAM AND PEACE

In the tenth chapter of the Qur'an, there is a verse which says, 'And God calls you to the home of peace and guides whosoever He wills to the straight path' (10:25). This and other similar verses tell us that the final goal of Islam is peace in this world as well as in the next. Those who continue to strive for peace, along with those who finally attain it, are of the elect, and will be welcomed in the perfect 'home of peace' that is, the world to come.

The real basis of that peace, which Islam is so anxious to foster, is monotheism. In the Islamic context, this concept emphasises not only the singleness of the deity, but also God's central position as the Creator and Sustainer of mankind and the universe. Islam sees all human beings as the creatures of the Almighty — a concept which brings them all on to one level. It is only when we do not connect God with man's existence that some appear great and others small.

When God is given His rightful place in the world, people are at once divested of those features which

distinguish one individual from another, placing them higher or lower in the human hierarchy. Then all greatness is God's and all human beings become His servants on a plane of equality.

In this way, the concept of monotheism pulls out by the roots all human differences and discrepancies. In the absence of such a concept, the scheme of divine peace becomes impossible. There is, in fact, no other basis upon which it may be achieved.

NON-INTERFERENCE

Another Islamic principle to promote peace is that of non-interference. This principle, if universally applied, can produce the same divine order as is evident in the furthest reaches of the universe, where the stars revolve eternally in their own orbits, no star ever encroaches upon the orbit of another. What holds good at the astronomical level also holds good at the level of human society. That is, order prevails when everyone functions within his own sphere, taking care never to trespass upon the domains of his fellow-men.

This, unfortunately, is a principle which is not

sufficiently adhered to. A case in point is the behaviour of a newly liberated American who went out to celebrate his country's freedom from foreign domination in his own particular way. He strutted exuberantly down the street, swinging his arms in a carefree manner and totally ignoring all other pedestrians. Eventually, he hit a passer-by on the nose.

The passer-by was enraged and said: 'What is this foolhardiness? What makes you walk in this frivolous manner, swinging your hands about in this way?' 'America is free,' the man replied. 'I'm free to do what I want and walk as I wish. 'Well' replied the passer-by, 'your freedom ends where my nose begins.'

The passerby's response was, in fact, the voice of man's true nature, reasserting universal norms and calling out for an end to man's deviation from them. The law of nature is such that the universe has functioned impeccably for billions of years, no star or planet ever having left its orbit to enter that of another. It is man's instinctive wish that he should be guided by such a law. The remonstrance of the

American passer-by was simply an expression of this desire.

In a universe which has been forcibly subjugated to the will of God, only man is privileged to have a will of his own. But while the entire universe conforms to God's will, each part functioning in exemplary harmony with all other parts, man misuses his freedom, straying from the path that God has laid down for him. The problems which he encounters in life are part of the price, in fact, which he has to pay for his God-given freedom. All his trials and tribulations are ultimately traceable to his own willful deviations.

PRINCIPLE OF AVOIDANCE

One of Islam's most important principles is that of avoidance, that is, the keeping of oneself aloof from avoidable confrontations. A good analogy is our obedience to the traffic control system, which prevents accidents by ruling that vehicles must keep to their own side of the road, never speed head-on towards each other, nor suddenly cross the path of another, allowing him no time to brake. Even far off the ground, collisions could occur if the

principle of avoidance were not invoked. Imagine two jet-airliners approaching each other at an altitude of 30,000 feet. Unless one of them received instructions to fly at, say, 35,000 feet, disaster would be inevitable.

The safety rules which apply to traffic embody the very principle which, if implemented, would relieve our everyday existence of so many unnecessary clashes. But before this can happen, this principle should have to be universally recognized and adopted.

There is no gainsaying the fact that our present world is one of competition, with everyone relentlessly pursuing his own ends. This being so, the only safe onward journey will be one on which people steer clear of one another whenever a clash of interests seems imminent. It is not in our hands to put an end to all such rivalry with its inevitable confrontations, for that is all part of the divine scheme of things. The sole remedy human beings themselves can offer is the scrupulous avoidance of a path which is directly confrontational. That is the only way in which disaster may be averted.

In the life of the Prophet Muhammad, we find a number of salutary examples, such as the decision he made when he learned that the great warrior Khalid ibn al-Walid was advancing upon him with his army. There seemed nothing for it but a pitched battle, but the Prophet, who was at that point approaching Hudaybiyyah on his way to Mecca from Medina, promptly took his men by a different route, choosing an unfamiliar path well away from the main thoroughfare along which Khalid and his troops were advancing. By this simple stratagem, he avoided what would certainly have been a disastrous confrontation. We would do well, in the highly competitive world of today, to follow the Prophet's example, in order to secure a safe and peaceful existence of all mankind.

CONVERSION

In a certain verse of the Qur'an, true believers a restated to be willing to forgive when they are angered, or, to put it in another way, they convert their anger into forgiveness. This is an important part of the teachings of Islam, and it has been described in the Qur'an in different ways. For

instance, at one place, it is stated that 'good and evil are not equal.

If we reflect upon the whole complex system, according to which our world functions, we shall come to the conclusion that it is essentially one of conversion. Through the conversion of matter, energy is created. Through the conversion of the soil's nutrients, trees are grown. The cow eats grass and the grass is converted by it into milk. Indeed, all kinds of progress depend upon this principle of conversion in the universe.

Man likewise is subject to these very processes, the lives of individuals as well as the cohesion of society being dependent upon this universal principle. In the case of true believers, the conversion is of anger into forgiveness. This is achieved by extinguishing the fire of revenge within themselves. Their hatred is then converted into love. In short, on all occasions when one reacts negatively to the misdeeds of one's fellow-men, one must make every endeavour to take this negative reaction and convert it into positive action.

This principle was exemplified in many ways throughout the life of the Prophet Muhammad. For instance, he had good reason to regard the Meccans as objects of his vengeance, for they had stubbornly opposed his message, forced him to leave the city and subsequently had waged war with the Muslims without there having been any provocation on the part of himself or his companions. But when Mecca was conquered, he did not treat them as war criminals which is, in effect, what they were, but, instead, forgave them unconditionally and unilaterally. The Prophet did not wreak his revenge on a single one of then.

NON-AGGRESSION

Another important Islamic principle calculated to guarantee a peaceful society is that of refraining from all offensive action. In Islam, war is to be waged only as a matter of defence, and that, too when it is quite unavoidable, The Qur'an permits to fight only against attackers, so that we have no right to wage war against anyone who is not on the offensive.

The Prophet Muhammad himself engaged directly in warfare on only three occasions, at Badr, Uhud and

Hunayn. In each case, he was forced into fighting. The Battle of Badr took place when the Meccan army advanced upon Medina with the avowed intention of slaying the Prophet and his Companions. Only then did the Prophet ready himself and his companions for defensive action. The battle of Uhud, which takes its name from a mountain on the periphery of Medina, was fought between the Meccans and the Muslims of Medina. The fact that the fighting took place on the borders of Medina, which is a 300-mile march from Mecca, is a clear indication of the defensive nature of the engagement as far as the Medinans were concerned. For the Prophet, there was no way out but to defend himself.

The third battle took place at Hunayn, when the Prophet was on his way from Mecca to Taif. The path to Taif lay between two mountains, and there, under cover of the mountainous terrain, the enemy lay in wait. Finding themselves suddenly ambushed, the Prophet and his Companions were forced to fight in self-defence.

Islam aims at fashioning souls which are God-oriented; which find God so great that everything

else pales into insignificance; which comes to possess such boundless peace of mind that nothing can disturb it; which is totally free of negative reaction; which can turn everything in this world, whether far or near, into food for more profound thought which, finally can never become a prey to worldliness. This truth is aptly illustrated by this *hadith*, of the Prophet Muhammad:

> Nine things the, Lord has commanded me:
>
> Fear of God in private and in public;
>
> Justness, whether in anger or in calmness;
>
> Moderation in both poverty and affluence;
>
> That I should join hands with those who break away from me;
>
> And give to those who deprive me;
>
> and forgive those who wrong me;
>
> and that my silence should be meditation;
>
> and my words remembrance of God;
>
> and my vision keen observation.
>
> (Razin)

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ISLAM IN THE PRESENT AGE

In its issue of June 15, 1992, *Time* magazine has made Islam its cover story with this title on the front page: 'Islam: Should the World Be Afraid?' Another title inside the magazine reads: 'The Sword of Islam.'

The aggressive picture of Islam as presented in the magazine articles is no exception. Such references to Islam are common occurrences in modern times. Once during a journey to a European country, I met a Muslim youth who told me of an experience he had had during an interview, which started as follows:

'Are you a Muslim?'

'Yes.'

'Then you are a terrorist.'

This is a clear indication of what the image of Islam has become in modern times — that of a terrorist religion. For this reason, people have come to regard Islam as a constant threat to universal peace, co-existence and solidarity. This, however, is a complete

misunderstanding, and is totally unrelated to the actual state of affairs.

The only acceptable way to determine the real position of Islam is to find out first of all what Islam sets out to achieve. Its goal is very clearly expressed in this verse of the Qur'an: 'O believers, be worshippers of the Lord.' (3:79) The word used in this text is *rabbani,* i.e. devoting oneself to God and to no other. That is to say that, your love and your fear should all be for God and God alone. The true goal of Islam is thus to form such devout individuals. Obviously, a human being of this kind cannot be formed through violence and war. This is entirely a matter of intellectual revolution and of a change of heart. And such a change of heart and mind can be brought about only by advice, counselling and *da'wah,* and not by recourse to violence.

If one were to speak of a 'violent merchant,' this would be a contradiction in terms. This is because no true businessman can afford to depart from the norms of peace. Commerce, by its very nature, makes one peaceable and willing to adjust. The same is true of Islam, by its very nature it is a

wholly pacific and conciliatory faith. An atmosphere of strife and brutality is anathema to the performance of Islamic *da'wah*, which can produce results only in an atmosphere of peace. How then could Islam possibly approve of war and violence?

When Islam is, in truth, a peace-loving religion, how has it come to be portrayed as the very opposite? This is a complete misapprehension which is traceable to two sources, one past and one present.

Let us first consider past contributory causes. It is a historical fact that certain battles against non-Muslims did take place during the Prophet's lifetime. These wars, however, were in no way related to the principles of Islam. They resulted rather from the external circumstances prevailing in the world of that time. These wars did not break out because Islam wanted to fight, but because others, by waging war against the Muslims had forced Islam to defend itself.

Islam came to the world one thousand four hundred years ago, in an age marked by religious

persecution. It is a matter of historical record that, in those days, a man considered it his birthright to suppress by force all religions other than his own, or that of the State.

That is why in ancient times each religion experienced violent reactions from the adherents of other faiths. For instance, for about fifteen hundred years from the time of its inception, Christianity was continuously subjected to persecution. Everywhere its followers met stiff opposition and were even subjected to torture or killed outright. Whereas today, the proponents of that same Christianity are engaged in all-out missionary work without the slightest risk of victimization.

If Christians were persecuted in ancient times, it was not because of their adherence to any militant ideology, the tenets of Christianity being the same in those days as they are today. The hostile reaction of the ancient world, as compared to the complaisance or even indifference of today, was conditioned rather by the age in which it took place — one in which religious persecution was the order of the day.

The modern age is totally different in that it is one of religious freedom. That is why proselytisers now meet, not with persecution, but with open-mindedness. All over the world, they are now presented with opportunities to carry on their religious work with complete impunity.

The same is true of Islamic history, in which all the incidents of armed conflict were due to the circumstances prevailing in that age, rather than to Islamic teachings. Islam had launched its missionary activities using completely peaceful means, but, it being an age of religious persecution, adherents of other religions opposed it tooth and nail. In this way, incidents of armed conflict became an unavoidable part of Islamic history. Nowadays, with this factor eliminated, the possibility of such wars has also, in principle, come to an end.

Those who are unaware of this aspect of Islamic development tend to attribute early conflicts, quite wrongly, of course, to tenets of Islam; they fail to appreciate that they resulted from external circumstances rather than from the internal features of Islam itself.

In modern times, Islam's aggressive image can be traced to the circumstances now prevailing in Muslim countries. In all Muslim countries, Muslims are divided into two broad categories, one called Islamists, and the other secular, or liberal.

With non-religious ideologies dominating people's minds today all over the world, it often happens that when elections are held in Muslim countries, they are won by a secular or liberal group. Now if democratic traditions are to be upheld, the Islamist group should bear with the liberals who have come into power until the expiry of their term in office. But Islamist groups in every country consider political power a right that they alone should enjoy. As such, whenever a liberal group is in control, the Islamist group assumes the role of aggressive opposition. Furthermore, whatever the activities of this Islamist group, they are all engaged in under the banner of Islam. As a result, its aggressive stance, whether ideological or practical, is attributed to Islam per se.

In actual fact, it is the self-styled Islamists who believe in militancy. And due to their

misrepresentation of their own religion, others have come to think of Islam as a militant religion. This is simply a misunderstanding. The facts are quite the opposite.

There is a *hadith* to guide us on this subject. It says: 'As you will be, so will your rulers be.' That is to say that it is society which produces the type of people it wants as its rulers. This ruling class then represents society.

That is why Islam has very specifically given us this injunction that when the rot sets in in the rulers, or ruling class, we should not directly clash with them. We should rather devote all our efforts to changing society in a constructive manner. The day society changes, the rulers will certainly change on their own. It is society which determines what type of ruler it wants. That is why the actual problem lies in changing society rather than in launching militant campaigns directed towards the unseating of rulers.

The so-called Islamist groups in Muslim countries has been engaged in ideological or practical campaigns directed against the rulers for the last fifty years. With no positive gain to date what has

happened is that the image of Islam has been gravely distorted to that of a religion with violence as part of its creed.

A further error committed by the Islamist group is to suppose the whole world to be their enemies. Then, in order to counter these 'enemy' nations, they are continuously engaged in ideological and military warfare, depending upon circumstances. Indulgence in violence is thus to be found both on an internal plane, against the Muslim liberals, and on an international plane, against non-Muslim nations.

This supposition that the whole world is the enemy of Islam is entirely without foundation. In the highly competitive world of today, one group or community is always trying to be ahead of the others. This is a state of affairs which has continued since man's advent on earth and it will continue until Doomsday. As such, it should be taken as a human challenge, rather than as a matter of enmity or opposition towards Muslims.

If we eliminate the erroneous impressions created by circumstances both in the past and the present,

in particular by the Islamists' politics, unguided as they are by the Qur'an and Hadith, the image of Islam that will emerge will be that of a religion based wholly on peace and mercy, which, in reality, is what it is. This is the real image as it evolves from Islamic teachings.

* * *

Man has been facing a number of challenges — intellectual, political, economic, etc — which are universal in the modern world. A major issue is whether man can continue to live in peace on this planet. This is a matter of crucial importance because man's very existence is in peril. It is the future of mankind which is at stake.

Various sets of adverse circumstances have together produced a state of unrest throughout the entire world. At different places groups of people are engaged in violent clashes with other groups. This state of affairs is such as to render our scientific progress meaningless, and it must be acknowledged that our very civilization is in jeopardy.

Unfortunately, in this baneful sequence of events, the name of Islam has come to be linked with violence. Thanks to the foolish and imprudent acts of certain Muslims, coupled with the propaganda campaign launched by Islam's antagonists, Islam and violence have come to be regarded as interchangeable terms.

But the truth about Islam is the very opposite. The word Islam itself means peace, having been derived from the Arabic root *silm* meaning peace. And the Prophet Muhammad is described in the scriptures as a 'mercy to the world.' The Qur'an has this to say: 'And God calls you to the home of peace. The lesson that is imparted through Hajj, a course of training for a Muslim for the whole of his life, is not to harm a single human being, not even an animal. To call such a religion one of violence is therefore highly inappropriate.

Islam came to mankind in an age when violence was an integral part of every nation's culture and, as such, was prevalent all over the world. Violence, it was thought, was the most dependable means for the achievement of all ends.

It was at this point in time that Islam brought to the world the message of peaceful co-existence, not only in theory, but also in practice. The truth is that Islam is a peaceful way of life: it was so for the man of the past, and it is so for the man of today.

But mere casual talk about peace is not going, of itself, to produce peace for mankind. It is essential rather to formulate a concept of peace in such a manner as to explain and underline its importance. Furthermore, such a concept must be accompanied by a methodology which will facilitate its practical realization.

SIMPLIFYING ONE'S DIFFICULTIES

The concept presented by Islam of peaceful living was based on the idea that, in this world, adversity is always accompanied by some positive, simplifying factor. That is to say that disadvantages will always be accompanied by advantages. The common man is nevertheless of the view that whenever any difficulty presents itself, the only solution is to fight. And it is this mentality which breeds violence. If, however, he could be convinced that whenever the path to success seemed barred to

him, there would always be something inherent in the situation to ease his difficulties, his whole manner of thinking would change.

This is not a concept which is immediately acceptable, the main reason being that most people have never formed the habit of identifying the positive factors in a seemingly negative situation. But once this concept has taken root in a man's mind, he will no longer clash, head-on, with anything unfavourable that comes in his way. He will, on the contrary, direct his efforts towards seeking whatever advantages lie in store for him. Then, only after securing these advantages will he start his struggle anew. In this way, on the ideological plane, this concept strikes at the very roots of violence. In addition to this conceptual approach, Islam offers a new methodology based on non-violence rather than on violence. Here I should like, very briefly, to deal with this topic.

WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THE POSSIBLE

The first principle of the non-violent method is to show willingness to accept what is possible. A fine, practical example of this principle was personally

demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad at the outset of his missionary career in Mecca. At that time, in Mecca, the most sacred house of worship, the Ka'bah, housed 360 idols. The ritual of Hajj had been distorted. For instance, the solar instead of the lunar calendar was being used for its observance. Drinking and other evils were rife.

Had the Prophet Muhammad directly launched a *jihad* against these evils, he would at once have set off a violent confrontation in Mecca, and the armed conflict would have overshadowed his message of peace.

The Prophet had, at that juncture, formulated an important principle of peace. Presenting it to the world, he put it into practice himself. The principle he followed was to make one's starting point centre on what was possible. That is to say, confine one's activity to the field in which opportunities are available under the prevailing system. The rest had to be left for the future.

This was the principle which he followed for thirteen years while working in Mecca. Any attempt to bring about a change in the system in Mecca would only have resulted in clash and

confrontation. He, therefore, set before himself the target of bringing about a change in the individual, and continued to work on those same lines for the whole of the Meccan period.

MOVING AWAY FROM THE POINT OF CONFRONTATION

Another principle formed by the Prophet in this regard was to move away from the point of conflict. This principle took practical shape in the Hijrah (emigration). It was in adherence to this principle that the Prophet emigrated to Medina, leaving his hometown, Mecca, in the thirteenth year of his Prophethood.

Hijrah literally means ‘to leave.’ It means that if the other party comes to the point of aggression in order to stop whatever peaceful work is being undertaken, then one must move away from that place rather than take to fighting.

Indeed, *hijrah* is just one of the strategies employed to avoid confrontation, but if it proves the best method, it must be resorted to, even if it entails leaving one’s homeland, property and relatives.

THE HUDAYBIYYAH PRINCIPLE

When the Prophet Muhammad emigrated to Medina, he did not launch any military campaign from there. His adversaries, the Quraysh, however, made military preparations and launched an onslaught without any provocation from the other side. It was due to this aggression that some defensive battles had to be fought. At this juncture, in order to avoid further bloodshed, the Prophet followed an excellent principle which can be termed the Hudaybiyyah principle.

What the Prophet Muhammad did with regard to the Hudaybiyyah treaty was to accept all the demands of the other party in return for their agreeing to his demand that no battle be fought between them, directly or indirectly, for a period of ten years. The Hudaybiyyah treaty was, in fact, a no-war pact. The Hudaybiyyah principle can thus be summed up in these words: unilateral acceptance of all the demands of the opposite party in order to obviate any risks of further clash and confrontation.

THE DEMONSTRATION RATHER THAN THE USE OF FORCE

In spite of this no-war pact, the Prophet's opponents reopened hostilities — thus committing a breach of their agreement. This time the Prophet adopted a different strategy, with the result that Mecca was ultimately conquered. Very few lives were lost, however, for, beyond minor skirmishes, no armed struggle between the opposing forces took place.

The superior strategy employed on the occasion of the conquest of Mecca was, quite simply, to achieve one's end, *not by the use of force, but by the demonstration of strength.*

REFRAINING FROM VENGEANCE

The initial strategy adopted by the Prophet after the conquest of Mecca was one of remarkable leniency. After the victory, men who had been his deadliest enemies were now brought before him. Today, we would call them war criminals of the worst kind. The only possible fate for such criminals in those days was summary execution. But the Prophet

granted them all an unconditional amnesty.

The greatest advantage of this general amnesty was that the country was spared a counter-revolution and all the bloodshed that would have ensued. Had the Prophet punished these men, the fire of counter revenge would most certainly have been ignited in the tribes all over Arabia. The shedding of Arab blood would then have reached a new peak.

RISING ABOVE THE PSYCHOLOGY OF REACTION

If a peaceful atmosphere is to be maintained in society while one goes about achieving one's ends, albeit in a peaceable manner, a great sacrifice is required. That is, one must give up all ideas of taking revenge. It is bad psychology and one must learn to rise above it. The Prophet's life was marked throughout by his readiness to make such a sacrifice. That is why he himself could set such a perfect example for the building of the life on the basis of non-violence.

One example of such a sacrifice can be seen in the Battle of Badr. In this battle, 70 Meccans had been

taken as prisoners of war. All of them belonged to the nobility of Mecca and all were well educated by the standards of that time. Considering that in Medina, where the Prophet was staying, the people lacked such an education, the Prophet did not order the execution of the Meccans, but instead set a 'ransom' for each of them. That is, each one had to teach ten children of the Ansar (Medinan inhabitants) how to read and write. After that they were to be set free.

At that time, one great risk was involved in setting these prisoners of war free. They being leaders of hostile tribes, there was the genuine fear that, once back in Mecca, they would use their freedom to incite the citizenry to prepare for another war. This fear became a reality when they succeeded in provoking their fellow-Meccans to fight the Battle of Uhud.

Fully aware of the risk involved, the Prophet had, nevertheless, set these Meccans free. This instance not only demonstrates his love of peace, but also underlines the importance he attached to education. He felt that its importance was so great that it had to be acquired — even at the risk of a future war.

These few points, though in brief, show that Islam has a great role to play in countering the deadly challenges, namely violence and conflict, which are faced by the world of today. I would add that this scheme of Islam is not based on mere ideology, but has a genuine history of practical success to back it. The history of Islam shows that its message of peace is not just a dream of utopia, but is a fully practicable programme. It is a historical fact that the Prophet Muhammad adopted such a well-considered strategy that all his successes were achieved with surprisingly little bloodshed. The toll of casualties in the revolution he brought about in Arabia amounted to only about a thousand on both sides. This number is comparatively so low that his revolution can rightly be termed bloodless.

Islam, in short is the science of strife-free living, supported by a factual history of peaceful co-existence.

* * *

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND SELF DEFENCE

Salman Rushdie’s book, *The Satanic Verses* has been

banned by the government of India on the grounds that it offends the sentiments of a certain community. Now journalistic opinions are being expressed that, by the same 'logic,' the Qur'an itself should be banned, because it too contains verses which hurt, or could hurt the sentiments of other communities. The verses in question relate to the guidelines given to Muslims (or the Muslims State) on the subject of fighting, i.e. when, and when not to fight. However, the manner of quotation would suggest — quite erroneously, as it happens — that the Qur'an enjoins its believers to exterminate all unbelievers.

Certainly, if this were so, these verses would injure the sentiments of non-Muslims. But this impression is given, not by the verses themselves, but by their having been pared down to suit this particular argument and then quoted out of context. In this way, unsuspecting readers are led to set a construction upon the words of the Qur'an which was never originally intended. There is an attempt to show how Muslims are urged on by their scripture to indiscriminate slaughtering of all non-Muslims, by quoting from the chapter entitled 'The

Cow'; 'And eject them, from whatever place they have ejected you; for *fitna* (religious persecution) is worse than killing. Fight, therefore, against them, untill there be no more *fitna* and the *deen* (religion) is God's.' This so-called quotation is nothing but a strung-together set excerpts from four consecutive verses, which left intact, deal exhaustively with the principles which should govern defensive fighting. Tampered with in the way they are, they give readers a very one-sided view of the pristine form and content of the original divine edict. The degree of distortion may be judged from the unabridged text of these verses, which is as follows:

> And fight in the way of God those who fight you and do not tresspass; surely God does not love the tresspassers. And kill them wherever you come upon them, and drive them out whence they drove you out; and *fitna* is more grievous than slaying. And do not fight them near the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you therein, but if they do fight you there, then kill them. That is the recompense of the unbelievers. Then if they desist, then surely God is Forgiving and Merciful. And fight

> them until there is no *fitna* and the *deen* (religion) is God's. But if they desist, fight none except the evil-doers (2:190-193).

When this passage advises: 'And fight with those who fight you,' its original context clearly indicates defensive, not offensive action. That is to say, it is not an injunction which is meant to be universal in application; it is meant to be applied only in emergencies when others have already committed aggression against believers. In any case, the correct rendering of this verse is 'And fight in *the way of God* those who fight you' (2:190).

To the best of our knowledge, there is no law, or international convention which proscribes self-defence. Nowhere is it held to be objectionable. The Qur'an for its part does no more than give its sanction to the right to self-defence. Should it then be banned for expressing the will of God in a manner which is fully in consonance with all laws and international customs?

Let us also look at what the Indian Penal Code has to say on the subject of self-defence. Article 96, which deals with fundamental rights, specifies that

'nothing is an offence which is done in the exercise of the right of private defence.' Could anyone interpret 'the right of private defence' as an injunction to individuals or communities to slaughter those who are of a different faith? All that Article 96 does is uphold what is generally considered to be a human right. Religious freedom is a separate issue and is dealt with, not by the Indian Penal Code, but by the Constitution of India, which gives Indian citizens full freedom in the matter of faith. Its wording makes it clear that one can neither be deprived of one's faith nor coerced into accepting an alien faith. Where self-defence and religious freedom are dealt with by two separate documents in the context of Indian secularism, one giving the basis on which laws may be made and the other providing deterrents for infringements of these laws, in Islam these two areas are dealt with together, in one holy Book. That does not mean that in such a context, they cannot be seen as separate issues.

But that is exactly the mistake which has been made in the recent expression of journalistic opinion. The laws of defence have been confused with the laws

of religion, and have been viewed as being mutually inextricable. Neither has any explanation been offered that the verses quoted from the Qur'an on 'killing' relate only to defence, i.e., to what Muslims must do when faced with aggression.

Religious freedom is not under attack in the Qur'an, but is actually upheld by it: 'There shall be no compulsion in religion. True guidance is now distinct from error. He that rejects *Taghut* (Satan), and puts his faith in God, shall grasp the firmest handle that will never break. God is hearing, knowing' (2:256). Then, addressing the Prophet, God says: 'Therefore give warning. Your duty is only to warn them. You are not their keeper' (88:21:22).

There are a number of similar verses in the Qur'an which make it quite plain that one's choice of religion or faith is wholly a matter of individual conscience, and that a change of faith must be the result of personal decision-making. In short, Islamic law gives the right of self-defence to all individuals and nations, and, so far as religious freedom is concerned, accepts it as a personal right. 'Killing'

relates only to defence, and is never intended as a means of suppressing religious freedom.

In spite of the Qur'an being quite unequivocal on this issue it has even been implied that Muslims have no option but to set about them with their swords. This distortion has been produced by quoting the 36th verse of the 33rd chapter.

The 36th verse reads: 'It is not for any believing man or woman, when God and His Messenger have decreed an affair that they should have any choice in their affair. Whosoever disobeys God and His Messenger has gone astray, into manifest error.' The preceding verse, the 35th, which is carefully omitted, reads: 'Those who surrender to God and accept the true faith; who are devout, sincere, patient, humble, charitable and chaste; who fast and are ever mindful of God — on these, both men and women, God will bestow forgiveness and a rich reward.' Clearly, there is nothing in all this to suggest the God-inspired adoption of a warlike stance, and the verses which follow relate only to correctness in personal relationships and social reform.

The occasion for the revelation of these verses concerned the initial rejection of a matrimonial alliance suggested by the Prophet of Islam in 4 A.H. The lady in question was a cousin of the Prophet from Medina, called Zaynab bint Jahash, who belonged to the highborn Quraysh family, and the husband proposed for her by the Prophet was Zayd ibn Harithah, a freed slave. In consideration of the racial and social disparities between them, Zaynab bint Jahash and her family rejected this proposal, Zaynab herself, insisting that she was of 'better blood' than Zayd. Now, Zaynab and her family were all Muslims, so that their rejection of Zayd on racial grounds ran counter to the spirit of the Qur'an. It was at this point that this verse was revealed, not to insist that human beings had no choice in matters of principle, but to show that the Shari'ah of Islam was based on the commandments of God, and not on national or familial traditions and customs. It is on record that after the revelation of this verse, Zaynab and her family gave up all notions of family pride and consented to this marriage in accordance with God's will.

In the context of its historical background,

(details of which are given in commentaries on the Qur'an) this verse stands out as landmark in a great social revolution: it marks the first time in human history that the artificial disparity between people was effectively put to an end by holding up equality as one of the noblest human ideals. This verse of the Qur'an should be not only a matter of pride to believers in the Qur'an but should also be of the greatest significance for all nations of the world. The revelation of this verse was a divine signal to humanity to free itself from false, centuries-old shackles. The new way of thinking which it stimulated in those early days has culminated in acceptance of human equality as an ideal all over the world of today.

The truth of the Qur'an's revelations should be plain for all to see. But there are none so blind as those who do not wish to see. They simply turn their eyes away from the light of true humanity. My opinion of those who have neither the mind nor the courage to acknowledge the truth is summed up by the Persian verse:

Why blame the sun

If a bat fails to see in the daylight?

*   *   *

IN THE SHADOW OF SWORDS!

'Paradise lies in the shadow of swords.' This statement made by the Prophet Muhammad is recorded in Hadith literature. Taken in its original context, it is an exhortation to peaceful coexistence. Recently, however, it was presented–out of context — as *The Times of India's* (May 19,1987) 'Thought for Today' and, as a result, has become the subject of gross misinterpretation. One reader remarked that he now knew why Muslims were always ready for a fight. 'This is only natural when their Prophet has himself said: 'Paradise lies in the shadow of swords.' Obviously, once they have heard this asserted, there will be nothing dearer to their hearts than war and martyrdom. Isn't it their profound conviction that to die on the field of battle is to ensure their passage through the gates of heaven?'

The only way to rectify such a glaring misconception is to put the Prophet's statement

back into its original context. The full text of the original *hadith* is as follows:

> Salim relates that a letter written to the Kharijite sect by Abd Allah ibn Abi Awfa, and conveyed to them by Amr ibn Ubayd Allah, tells of how on certain days, when the Prophet was engaged in a military campaign, he would wait until the sun had almost set and then, standing up amidst his Companions, he would say: 'Oh my people, be not eager to meet the enemy on the field of battle. Ask God instead for peace. But, when confronted by the enemy, stand fast and do not flinch. You must know that Paradise lies in the shadow of swords? Then the Prophet prayed to God: 'Oh God, You who reveal the Scripture, who set the clouds afloat, who defeat armies defeat them, and grant us succour in our struggle against them.

This passage, recorded in three major works on the Hadith, respectively by al-Bukhari, Muslim and Abu Da'ud, appears in each case in the

chapter *on jihad* (holy war). But according to all three authors—all of them Imams—the true message of this *hadith* is that there should be no keenness to meet the enemy on the field of battle. The chapters in which this *hadith* is included are in fact, centred on this theme, al-Bukhari entitles his chapter: 'Have no longing to meet the enemy on the field of battle' and both Muslim and Abu Da'ud have headed their chapters: 'Disapproval of eagerness to meet the enemy on the field of battle.' Quite clearly, all three Imams take this *hadith* as an exhortation to keep the peace and, in no instance, do they take it as an incitement to do battle.

The Prophet's saying: 'Paradise lies in the shadow of swords' is indisputably a reference to the act of fighting as a matter of self-defence, and can not by any stretch of the imagination be construed to mean that doing battle in the name of Islam is a guarantee of one's admission to Paradise. It only signifies that when Muslims are attacked, they must resolutely defend themselves. There should be no aggression on the part of the believers, but, when forced to defend themselves,

they should do so with the utmost steadfastness. Then they can be sure of Paradise as their reward.

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RELIGIOUS HARMONY

What the world needs today — perhaps more than anything else — is an acceptable formula for the attainment of religious harmony. This being currently one of the most important topics under discussion, I shall attempt to present here, in brief, the Islamic viewpoint.

Let us begin with a verse of the Qur'an which reads:

> He that chooses a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and in the world to come he will be one of the lost (3:85).

In the opinion of certain interpreters, this verse implies that salvation according to Islam is destined exclusively for Muslims. Islam thus appears to uphold the superiority of the Muslim community. But this is an out-of-context interpretation and is certainly not correct.

Let us take another verse of the Qur'an which serves as an explanation of the above-quoted verse. It states that:

> Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabeans — whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right — shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or to regret (2:62).

This verse rules out the concept of community superiority for any given group: even Muslims have been bracketed here along with other religious groups. The content of this verse makes it very clear that salvation, by Islamic standards, depends upon the individual's own actions, and that it is not the prerogative of any group. No man or woman can earn his or her salvation by the mere fact of associating with a particular group. Salvation will be achievable only by a person who truly believes in God and the world hereafter, and who has given genuine proof in this life of having lived a life of right action.

Another important aspect of Islam is that it does not advocate belief in the manyness of reality; on the

contrary, it stresses reality's oneness. That is, according to Islam, reality is one, not many. That is why, in describing monotheism, the Qur'an states:

> Such is God, your rightful Lord. That which is not true must needs be false. How then can you turn away from Him? (10:32)

This verse makes it clear that monotheism (i.e. one Lord being the Creator, Sustainer and object of worship) is the only truth. All other paths lead one away from, rather than towards the truth. The fact that certain religious thinkers believe in the manyness of reality is of no concern to Islam. With oneness as its ideal, it cannot accept manyness even as a hypothesis.

Both of the above points — (a) the oneness of Absolute Reality, and (b) Salvation as the prerogative of the true believer in this oneness — form a major part of Islamic ideal. Just being born into a certain group or community, or associating oneself with others of similar persuasions, does not entitle one to salvation, be one a Muslim or a non-Muslim.

Now let us deal with the fact that; in practice, different kinds of religious groups do exist. Then, given the various kinds of differences separating them, let us consider, how to bring about harmony between them.

One solution commonly advocated is to spread the conviction that all religions are essentially one: that they are simply diverse paths leading to a common destination. Islam, however, does not accept this view and, in any case, experience has shown that repeated attempts to bring about harmony on this basis have been a failure. The Emperor Akbar attempted to achieve harmony by state enforcement of his newly formed religion, 'Din-e-Ilahi;' Dr Bhagwan Das spent the best part of his life producing a one thousand page book titled *Essential Unity of All Religions;* Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) attempted to spread this ideal at the national level by a countrywide movement whose slogan was *'Ram Rahim ek hai,'* meaning Ram and Rahim were one and the same. But events have shown us that all failed in their attempts to achieve the goal of religious harmony.

Islam's approach to the entire problem is much more realistic in that it accepts ideological differences. Once having accepted these differences, it then advocates the policy of tolerance and respect for one another in everyday dealings. This is on a parallel with the principle expressed in the English saying. 'Let's agree to disagree.'

In this connection, one of the commands of the Qur'an is that, in principle, 'there shall be no compulsion in religion' (2:256). At another place it declares that 'you have your religion and I have mine' (109:6). It was as a result of this commandment that, when the Prophet Muhammad migrated to Medina, he issued a declaration reaffirming his acceptance of the religion of Muslims for the Muslims and the religion of Jews for the Jews.' In order to perpetuate the atmosphere of mutual harmony, the Qur'an commands the Muslims in their dealings with unbelievers not to 'revile (the idols) which they invoke besides God, lest in their ignorance they should spitefully revile God.'

This principle formulated by Islam is best described not as religious harmony, but as harmony among

religious people. This is a principle whose utility is a matter of historical record. It is evident that in the past as well as in the present, wherever religious harmony has existed, it has been based on unity despite differences, rather than on unity without differences. It is not based on agreeing to agree, but on agreeing to disagree.

One extremely revolutionary example of this principle is to be found in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. It concerns the conference of three religions which was held in the Prophet's own mosque in Medina. This conference is described by Muhammad Husain Haykal in his book, *The Life of Muhammad:*

> The three scriptural religions thus confronted one another in Madinah. The delegation entered with the Prophet into public debate and these were soon joined by the Jews, thus resulting in a tripartite dialogue between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This was a truly great congress which the city of Yathrib had witnessed. In it, the three religions which today dominate the world and determine its

> destiny had met, and they did so for the greatest idea and the noblest purpose.

Although Islam believes, in the oneness of reality it lays equal stress on the practice of tolerance in everyday dealings, even if it means going to the extent of permitting non-Muslims to come to an Islamic place of worship for religious discussion, and if it is time for their prayers letting them feel free to perform their worship according to their own ways in the mosque itself.

Tolerance has been the rule throughout the history of Islam. It has, in fact, been one of the main underlying causes of its successful dissemination. Here I quote from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica:*

> Islam achieved astonishing success in its first phase. Within a century after the Prophet's death in AD 632 (the early generations of Muslims) it had brought a large part of the globe — from Spain across central Asia to India — under a new Arab Muslim empire.

And this is the part which I wish particularly to stress:

> Despite these astonishing achievements other religious groups enjoyed full religious autonomy (9/912).

Now the complicating factor is that when any religion having reached this stage of antiquity has secured a sacred place in the hearts of its believers, it becomes impossible to bring about any changes in it. Efforts to bring about a change can produce a new religion, but they can never succeed in changing the old religion. There are many examples of such failures in the past.

A very important point from the practical point of view is that although the necessity to bring about harmony among the different religions is not a newly-felt imperative, endeavours towards that end are still only in the formative stages. If progress towards that goal has been slow of attainment, it is because of the established positions which ancient religions have secured in the hearts of their followers, simply by virtue of their antiquity. Trying to bring about changes in these religions per se has never brought about harmony, because instead of old religions being brought closer

together by this process, they have developed rather into new religions, a process which has either left the problem of disharmony unsolved or has further aggravated it. There are many examples of such abortive efforts in the past.

In view of this historical reality, it is clear that the suggestions made by Islam as to how to produce harmony among the different religions is the only viable solution. Any alternative suggestion, however attractive it might appear, would be either impracticable or counter-productive.

Once, when discussing this point with me, a religious scholar said, 'We have been attempting to bring about interreligious harmony for the last one hundred years, but the results have been quite dismal. It would seem that there are insurmountable obstacles in the way.'

I replied that the goal we want to attain is certainly a proper one; it is simply that the strategy we employ is impracticable. Religious harmony is without doubt a desirable objective. But it cannot be achieved by attempting to alter people's beliefs — a policy advocated by more than one scholar in this

field. The only way to tackle the problem is to encourage people to show respect for others' beliefs and to be humanitarian at all times in their dealings with adherents of other religions. It is vital to realize that it is quite possible to inculcate this attitude without in any way tampering with long-cherished credos. It should never be conceded that the goal of religious harmony is unattainable simply because people's beliefs differ from each other. It is certainly a possibility provided that it is seen as a matter of practical strategy and not as a pretext for making ideological changes.

'Practical strategy' is something which people regularly resort to in matters of their daily existence. As such, it is a known and acceptable method of solving the problem. Since no new ground has to be broken, either for the religious scholar or for the common man, it should be a very simple matter for people to extend their everyday activity, within their own sphere of existence, to include an honest and sincere effort towards global religious harmony. It is simply a question of having the will and the foresight to do so.